

FAQS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQS were developed by Friend of Loring Park Volunteers Randy Schultz and Kay Samuelson

WHAT IS THE BUILDING AT THE EDGE OF THE POND NEAR THE GARDEN AND THE BRIDGE?

The 18x37 foot structure was built at a cost of \$3600 in 1916 (building permit B 124422 9/9/16) as a "Comfort Station," or restrooms in present parlance. Men's facilities were located at the north end of the building, ladies at the south end. It served this purpose until sometime in the late 1960s or 70s. It is a popular subject of artists and often serves as a backdrop for portrait, fashion, and wedding photography.

These days the building holds maintenance equipment and the pond aeration system. It is used by the park gardener and the garden volunteers as a storage and staging area for the garden.

WHAT IS THAT BUILDING WITH THE 'POINTY' TOP?

It's called Performance Place, and it serves as a preparation area or "green room" for those using the stage at the north end of the building. When the 22x28 foot building was constructed in 1889 in the park's southeast corner it served for 17 years as the office of the first Superintendent of Minneapolis Parks, Captain William Morse Berry, during the latter part of his nearly 21-year tenure. His successor, Theodore Wirth, moved to accommodations next to the Board's convening room in City Hall soon after taking office in 1906, and the building was used primarily as a tool shed after that. At some point it was moved a short distance to a location close to 15th Street, where it briefly hosted "Loring Park Place," a sandwich and ice cream shop in the 70s. In 1998 it was relocated to its present site and restored to its original appearance, including a replica of the cupola which may have been removed as a result of storm damage early in its history. The restoration won the prestigious CUE Award (Commission on Urban Development) in 1998, and the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota's Historic Preservation Award the following year. The whimsical structure was designed by Harry Wild Jones (b. 6/9/1859 -- d.9/25/1935), perhaps best known for the Butler Building and the exterior of the chapel at Lakewood Cemetery. He also designed two restroom buildings at Lake Harriet, which are now the oldest buildings in the Minneapolis Park System.

HOW OLD IS LORING PARK?

It dates from 1883 and the creation of the Board of Park Commissioners. Originally it was called Central Park, but was renamed in late 1890 to honor Charles Morgridge Loring (b. 1833 -- d. 1922) who served as a Minnesota Supreme Court Justice and who was the first President of the Board of Park Commissioners in 1883. Loring is now known as The Father of Minneapolis Parks. It was not the first official park (that is Murphy Square on the Augsburg College Campus), but it was the first park in the system to have electric lights. Open arc lights were installed in 1884 and used to illuminate the pond during the winter skating season. In 1916 the Minneapolis General Electric Company provided the park with 91 lights.

SINCE THIS WAS CALLED CENTRAL PARK, DID FREDERICK LAW OLMSTEAD DESIGN IT?

No, he did not. But Loring's original master plan was developed in the 1880s by Olmstead's contemporary and friend, Professor Horace William Shaler Cleveland (b. 1814 -- d.1900) who'd assisted Olmstead on Brooklyn's Prospect Park project. Cleveland's plans were revisited in the early 1990s by renowned urban architect, Diane Balmori, and a new Master Plan incorporating many of Cleveland's concepts, was adopted by the Park Board in 1996.

DID OLMSTEAD DESIGN ANY OF THE MINNEAPOLIS PARKS?

Yes, though not intentionally. In 1883, flour and lumber magnate, Senator William D. Washburn built one of the largest and most impressive mansions ever erected in the region on ten acres of land directly north of what is now the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Named "Fair Oaks" for an impressive stand of oaks on the property, the Queen Anne/Romanesque Revival manse was designed by E. Townshend Mix who also designed another lost architectural treasure, the Metropolitan Building. Olmstead's equally impressive landscape included a pond with an artificial stream, rustic footbridge,

and a green house. The estate was donated to the Park Board following Washburn's death in 1911. In 1924, exercising typical foresight, they chose to demolish the house along with many of the landscape features. Nonetheless, even today, the Master's touch is still quietly, but clearly, evident in Washburn Fair Oaks Park.

HOW BIG IS LORING PARK?

The park today is 32.94 acres. Shortly after the Board of Park Commissioners was created in 1883, the board purchased the initial 30.16 acres of land for \$147,125.72. In 1890, 2.5 acres bordering on Willow street were procured for \$105,000. An additional .28 acre was added in 1902 at a cost of \$13,466.83.

HOW MANY TREES ARE IN THE PARK?

There are approximately 500 trees of 32 species within the park grounds. The exact number is variable due to the continual replacement of old, storm damaged, dead, and diseased specimens with new ones. Dutch Elm disease resulted in the loss of at least 40 mature elms in the park since the 1960s, including the "Loring Elm" planted by the park's namesake on May 28, 1916. Additionally, at least 10 have been lost to high winds in the past fifteen years. Fortunately, 23 mature specimens survive and are being treated to prevent further loss through the generosity of Friends of Loring Park. (The many replacement elms which have been planted are reputedly resistant to the disease.) The oldest tree in the park is a Bur Oak, likely about 300 years old, located in the circle on top of the hill in the northeast quadrant of the park.

HAS THE GARDEN ALWAYS BEEN HERE?

No, but gardens have always been a dominant feature of the park. H.W.S. Cleveland's Master Plan from the 1880s called for a "wishbone" shaped conservatory to be situated in the area where the tennis courts are now located. It was to be surrounded and fronted with a series of graceful intersecting pathways framing planting beds of various shapes and dimensions in an overall "egg" or "heart" configuration. While that plan was never realized, numerous and extensive gardens have graced the park throughout its history. At some point, a series of individual beds cut into the turf formed a large circular formal display in the southwest quadrant of the park. More recently the numbers of beds were reduced, and the displays became less spectacular, until finally, during the renovation of the park in the mid-1990s, the area was given over to a newly constructed horseshoe court. At the same time, Diane Balmori's Master Plan called for the construction of 15,000 square foot circular garden in the center of the park, on the site formerly occupied by the horseshoe court. In 1998, after an intensive, community involved, two-year design process, the "bones" were installed, and in 1999 volunteers began in earnest the arduous task of planting the many thousands of plants and "woodies" that adorn this gracious and tranquil space. Bringing this garden concept to fruition is doubtless The Friends of Loring Park's most significant contribution to the park to date.

DOES THE GARDEN HAVE A THEME?

Indeed, it does! Considered as a whole, it's called The Garden of the Seasons and its paths are aligned precisely to the points of the compass. As the name implies, it has been designed to be beautiful and appealing throughout the entire year. The outer ring is known as the Tapestry of Green which features low growing junipers, shrubs, and grasses accentuating the subtle variations of the hue, and serves as a gentle introduction to the garden within. The middle ring is called The Wheel of Color and each of the eight individual wedges are largely filled with perennials of a predominant color -- two each in blue, red, yellow, and white. At the center is the circular Inner Woodland Garden which features a collection of trees, which, as they reach maturity, will provide a shady canopy for native wild flowers that will gradually replace the present interim plantings of alien perennials and annuals.

WHO MAINTAINS THE GARDEN?

The Garden of the Seasons has been a collaborative effort of Friends of Loring Park (FLP) and the Minneapolis Park Board. In addition to the construction costs, FLP volunteers contributed to the initial as well as the ongoing design process, and continue to assist the one professional gardener provided by the Park Board with all aspects of the garden's maintenance and design. Many neighborhood residents

have moved from houses with gardens to condos and apartments and find volunteering in the garden to be a therapeutic opportunity to connect with nature and "dig in the dirt."

HOW CAN I VOLUNTEER IN THE GARDEN?

Volunteers are welcome in the garden almost any time and especially on the second Saturdays of the spring, summer and fall months. Call the FLP Hotline, 612.673.5395, or see the Volunteer tab on this website.

ARE THOSE LOONS ON THE POND?

No. Though they look very much like loons in the water, Double-Crested Cormorants are smaller, all black in feather coloration, and are regular summer visitors to the park, feeding on the abundant fish in the pond. Other frequent visitors are Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egret, and the diminutive Green Heron. In addition to the ubiquitous Canada Geese, various ducks, Seagulls and American Rock Doves or pigeons, a number of hawks and owls can occasionally be observed in the park, as well as a host of smaller species too numerous to list. Many visitors also enjoy the abundance of Monarch and other butterflies in the garden in late summer and fall.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GOLDFISH?

They're still there. Though the dredging and lining of the pond in 1997 greatly reduced their numbers, which during the middle of the 20th century were so high as to be visible from airliners passing overhead, some managed to survive, and an occasional 8-inch glowing specimen might occasionally be seen dangling from a heron's beak. In addition, the D.N.R. regularly stocks the pond with various species of game fish.

HOW DEEP IS THE POND, AND HOW BIG IS IT?

The smaller arm of the pond, north of the bridge, was dredged swampland and is rather shallow, about 3 feet. The larger arm reaches a depth of 17.3 feet in the center. Engineering reports indicate the mean depth is 1.5 meters (4.9 feet). The surface area is roughly 8 acres, and the pond's volume is 12.9 million gallons. Originally the pond was spring fed, but street construction halted the flow, and it's now maintained by natural rainfall supplemented by an artesian well located in the northwest quadrant of the park.

WHAT'S THE DISTANCE AROUND THE POND?

The pathway circling the pond is 3070 feet long or .5814 mile (.9567 km). If one takes the "figure eight" route, crossing the bridge, the distance covered is 3374 feet or .6390 mile (1,0284 km). The distance around the smaller arm of the pond alone is 1301 feet or .2464 mile (.3965 km) whereas the larger arm is 2073 feet, or .3926 mile (.6319 km).

HAS THE BRIDGE BEEN THERE LONG?

The present iron bridge was erected at the neck of the pond in 1885, replacing an earlier wooden structure at the same site.

IS IT OKAY TO PICK THE WEEDS AROUND THE POND?

Minneapolis' General Regulations Governing Conduct PB2-2, "Molesting Vegetation", strictly prohibits the destruction of, damage to, or the removal of, ANY vegetation from a public park. These are not weeds but native plants that have been installed along and in the shoreline at considerable expense in terms of time, labor, and money to reduce the population of Canada Geese in the park. (They avoid areas with tall vegetation, presumably because it affords cover for predators.)

ARE THERE STILL TURTLES IN THE POND? I DON'T SEE THEM ANYMORE.

Both painted (also called "mud") and snapping turtles laid eggs in The Garden of the Seasons during 2005. Before cattails engulfed the island thirty or more could often be spotted basking in the sun on the "turtle logs" provided for them. Though not as visible now, they apparently still find the environment to their liking.

WHAT ARE THE BUBBLES ON THE POND - SWAMP GAS?

No indeed. A compressor in the storage building near the bridge forces air through a series of tubes on the floor of the pond with twenty-odd outlets to oxygenate the water, retarding algae production and generally improving the water quality.

CAN WE FEED THE DUCKS AND SQUIRRELS?

Minneapolis Ordinance #229.60 prohibits the feeding of wild birds (except feeders and platforms that are a minimum of 48" above the ground), and, as the sign near the Woman's Club Pier states, "Feeding the fowl makes the water foul." The extreme overabundance of squirrels in the park, brought about by artificial feeding and a lack of natural predators in this urban environment, results in extensive, and expensive, damage to park structures, wiring, and plantings every year. In addition, human foods can endanger the health of wildlife and even lead to death. Let's enjoy these wild creatures as they are, since they've fed themselves all along without assistance.

WHO WAS BENJAMIN BERGER?

The donor of the Berger fountain also known as the Dandelion Fountain emigrated from Poland in 1913 at the age of 16. His various business ventures included ownership of the Lakers basketball and Minneapolis Millers hockey teams, Sheik's Café, and a string of movie theaters. He also served as a Park Commissioner.

WILL THE BERGER FOUNTAIN BE 'SAVED'?

Since its dedication in 1975, the fountain has become a beloved icon of the park and a determined assemblage of concerned citizens is diligently working to save and restore it.

WHERE IS THE AIDS MEMORIAL?

Though an area was set aside in the southeast corner of the park in the 90s, a permanent installation has not yet come to fruition.

WHY IS THERE A STATUE OF OLE BULL?

He was a famous Norwegian violinist (b. 1810 -- d. 1880). The virtuoso was also noted as a composer for the Hardanger fiddle (hardingfele). This unique instrument was developed in the 1650s and has a series of four or five "sympathetic" strings mounted under the primary strings which resonate when played. The statue honoring him was dedicated on May 17, 1897, sponsored through the combined efforts of the Ole Bull Memorial Association and the Nordmaendenes Sanforening of Minneapolis. The heroically scaled statue, created by Jacob Fjelde, was unveiled by Miss Ragnhild Sorenson and accepted on behalf of the city by the Honorable Robert Pratt, Mayor of Minneapolis. The musician's son, Alexander, was present and played one of his father's compositions. The statue underwent a restoration in 2000 with a \$16,000 grant from SOS! (Save Outdoor Sculpture!) funded by the Target Corporation and a \$20,000 contribution from the Sons of Norway.

HOW CAN I ORDER A GARDEN PAYER OR A BENCH OR GET INVOLVED IN FRIENDS OF LORING PARK?

Email, call or see the Donate tab.