

NEENAH'S PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Columbian Park

IN 1843 the early settlers, many of whom came from the New England States, set aside as a village "green" one and six-tenths acres of ground, now known as Columbian Park, still referred to by older residents as "The Green." It is interesting to know that our "Green" is older by fourteen years than famous Central Park in New York City.

This area, in the center of our first ward, has always been a play center. It contains two softball diamonds for summer use. The center of the park is flooded in winter for ice skating. In the northeast corner of the "Green" we find a sandbox and play apparatus for small children. Along the west border are two electrically lighted tennis courts, also lighted horseshoe courts. An artistic shelter building provides toilet facilities, storage and a warm room for skate changing in winter.



Riverside Park

TO MR. JOHN PROCTOR, more than to any other citizen of his time, belongs the credit for municipal ownership of this property. He was far-sighted. He believed that "where there is no vision, the people perish." The entire point might have been bought for a song, and Mr. Proctor urged its purchase by the city, but his argument fell on deaf ears. As a compromise, the Council did, in 1872, buy the nineteen and one-half acres which we now know as Riverside Park. \$4,400.00 was paid for the property, and the records reveal that considerable criticism was leveled against our city fathers for so extravagant a use of public funds.

An eighth grade girl, never dreaming that her expression would find its way into print, penned these lines:

"A more beautiful sight could not be found than the Fox River near the Riverside Park on a mild spring day. The hazy atmosphere and the calm rippling water is quite bewitching. The river, always the color of the sky, is a heavenly blue, and the



New pavilion, Riverside Park, opened to the public during the summer of 1956.

reflection of the lovely green foliage in its mirror-like surface is exquisite. A person sitting on the shore of the river drinking in its beauty could not help being charmed with the blending of the different tints into one perfect harmony.”

In the early days Riverside Park became a mecca for steamboat excursions from other cities. A dance pavilion was constructed in the north tip of the park, adjacent to the dock. A shelter for picnic tables was nearby, and two toilet houses were spotted in the center of the area.

During the 1930's Phelps Wyman, of Milwaukee, an eminent landscape architect, was employed by the city to design Washington Park and to redesign Riverside Park. According to his plan, the original drive, which closely followed the shoreline, was moved to its present position.

Mr. Wyman and the then Park Board visualized a new pavilion facing west in the deep bend of the drive, embodying all needed features, such as toilet facilities, kitchen, stage, dance floor and space needed by the yachting enthusiasts, particularly during regattas. The pavilion

was constructed on the east side of the drive during the fall of 1955 and spring of 1956, coming into full use over the summer of 1956.



Shattuck Park

IN THE early days of the city, the site of Shattuck Park was occupied for varying periods by the Northwest Sewer Pipe Company, the Arthur Bishop Marble Works, Fenton and Chalfant Coal and Wood Yards, C. A. Sorenson's Boat Works, the Neenah Steam Laundry, and as a dumping ground for refuse. About 1910, Clara A. Shattuck conceived the idea of securing this property and converting it into a beauty spot. The completed park was deeded to the city of Neenah by Mrs. Shattuck in 1915. Shattuck Park contains one and six-tenths acres. Its shoreline measures approximately 400 feet.

In 1957 this park was reconstructed to provide accommodation not only for the vast increase in small power boats, but for the parking of cars of boat owners. The center of the park was re-done, creating a beauty spot, with flowers and high-growing shrubbery, where citizens may come for relaxation or enjoyment of the noon lunch.



Doty Park

PRIOR to 1922, the larger part of the area known as Doty Park was a low-lying piece of property owned by C. B. Clark, whose father purchased it many years before with the thought that some day he or his family might utilize it as a building site. In 1922, however, Mr. Clark presented it to the city for park purposes. A group of individuals added to Mr. Clark's gift by purchase of the frontage on Lincoln Street, making, in all, nine and 25/100 acres. The shoreline measures approximately 1,200 feet.

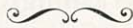
To secure the fill for the low portions of this tract, and at the same time, to produce an artistic feature in itself, a lagoon was dredged through the lowest section of the property. The dredging created an

island which also adds charm to the landscape. In August, 1928, Doty Park, in its present form, was dedicated.

The opening of this park corrected an unbalanced community situation. There had been a growing desire on the part of residents of the third and fifth wards for a park on their side of the river. The construction of this park on the "Island" was also in line with the policy of the park board to eventually secure a park or a playground for each major section of the city.

At the Lincoln Street entrance of the park stands a replica of the "Mansion" of Wisconsin's second territorial governor, James Duane Doty. The Grand Loggery now houses a growing collection of historic objects. (The present structure is a replica of the original, and was constructed in 1948.)

This park, designed by Mrs. Elizabeth Thuerer, is easily Neenah's most beautiful open space. Phelps Wyman, consultant of the park board from 1929 to 1932, added a delicate touch to the original design by opening up vistas through the shrubbery, looking out onto Lake Winnebago, across to Riverside Park, and south to Wisconsin Avenue.

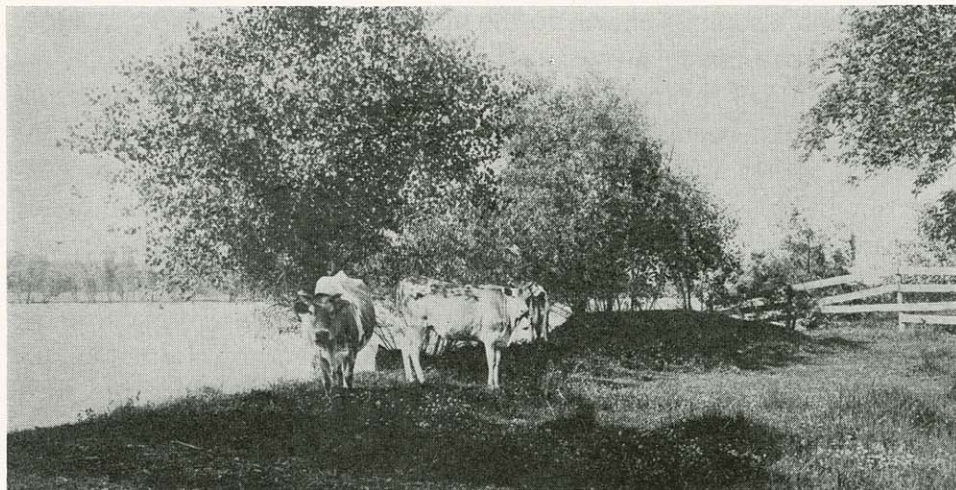


Kimberly Point Park

IN 1929, a superb property, called Kimberly Point Park, was added to Neenah's park system, the gift of Mrs. Helen Kimberly Stuart. The park looks east onto the broad expanse of Lake Winnebago and north onto the mouth of the river.

In 1944, Mr. J. C. Kimberly, sensing the need of a light marking the entrance to the river, donated sufficient funds to erect a beautiful lighthouse at a point where lake and river meet. This structure also serves as a comfort station for the Kimberly Point area.

Beautiful Lake Shore Drive makes a U turn around the outer edge of Kimberly Point, joining with North Park Avenue, which lies to the west of the park. The strip of land outside the drive, bordering the 870 feet of shoreline, is rich in scenic value. Any pleasant evening

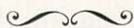


Kimberly Point in 1902.

during the summer or early fall, small groups may be seen at the outdoor ovens preparing their picnic supper.

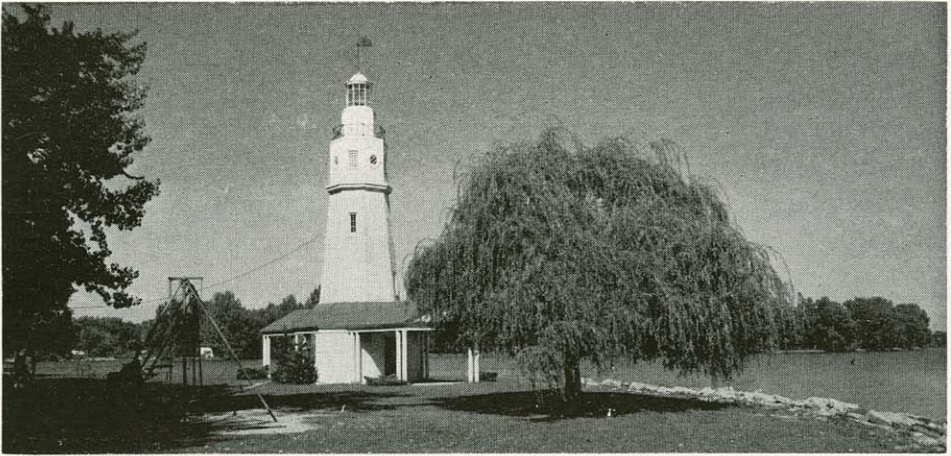
Mrs. Stuart was instrumental in providing the colorful cherry and other blooming trees on Kimberly Point. Among these choice trees was a shoot from the famous Washington Elm. This is now a sturdy tree, properly marked, and a constant reminder of our American heritage.

It will be remembered that the "Old Council Tree," rendezvous of the Indians, stood close to Kimberly Point. This site is indicated by a monument in commemoration of the Old Council Tree and the American Indians who met under its branches.



Water Street Area

IN 1931, when the City Council voted to construct a concrete retaining wall between the foot of Lincoln Street and the C&NW tracks, they did what they voted to do—and more. The wall made it possible to reclaim from the Fox River, two and three-tenths acres of land which, in due time, passed into the keeping of the city.



Lighthouse on Kimberly Point today.

Washington Park

OUR community is indebted to Mrs. Sara Bergstrom, whose gift, in 1931, financed the purchase of most of the property included in this eleven and one-half acre tract. Ordinarily, the construction of a park of this size would extend over several years, and the cost would be cared for by appropriations of successive Councils. However, the city's need for work projects during the depression squeezed into a short space of time what would otherwise have been a long process.

This area is designed primarily for play. Its eastern edge is laid out for the use of little children. Three tennis courts fit into the southwest corner. A field for hardball takes the center of the stage, and the swale adjusts itself to a softball diamond for summer use and an ice rink in winter. During the winter of 1932-33, 262 mature trees were transplanted into our parks and street borders. Many of these may be seen in Washington Park, where they create a pleasing effect without in any way detracting from the freedom of play.



High School Athletic Field

IN 1931 the original plan of the then School Board was to build the High School and its athletic field on only the west half of what is now

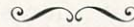
the school property. The east half was residential and pasture land. Through the cooperation of Mr. and Mrs. S. F. Shattuck, the entire block was acquired. The grounds, as they now exist, were laid out by Phelps Wyman, landscape architect, and planted by Klockner Bros., landscape gardeners.

Subsequently, the city, through its School Board, acquired nine additional acres to the south, making total playing fields of 20.7 acres.



Laudan Fields

SOUTHWEST of our High School Athletic Field lie two fields, each 144 × 600 feet. We find this property set aside for park purposes in the original plot of Bigelow's Addition dated 1856. The fields take their name from a Mr. Laudan, whose residence property fronted on them. As the city extended itself southward, these tracts became increasingly valuable as a neighborhood playground and for pupils of the Wilson School.



Park Statistics

Approximate Park Acreage:

Riverside Park	19.5
Kimberly Point	3.5
Columbian	1.6
Shattuck	1.6
High School Fields	20.7
Laudan Fields	4.0
Doty Island	9.25
Water Street	2.3
Washington	11.5
Cook	.99
Swimming pool & field	8.4
Second Ward Playground	4.01
Hoover School Area	5.00
Whiting Boat House	.5

92.85

Approximate Water Frontage:

Doty Island	1,200 feet
Riverside	1,500 feet
Kimberly Point	870 feet
Shattuck	400 feet
Water Street	500 feet
Washington	150 feet
Lake Shore Avenue	2,256 feet
Wisconsin Avenue	500 feet
Whiting Boat House	84.6 feet
Swimming pool & field	653 feet

8,113.6 feet

Recreation

IN 1911 we find the first recorded expenditure for playground equipment—\$15.51 for swings in Riverside Park. Three years later \$50 was appropriated for tree removal and layout of baseball diamond on the “Green.”

1916 saw appointment of Paul Coon, a public school physical education instructor, to conduct playground activities from June 12 to August 1. This must have been an unimpressive experiment, for nothing more is recorded concerning organized summer recreation till 1926, when the Council turned down a formal request for a program to cost \$3,500.

In 1926, however, through Red Cross and private contributions, George Christoph was employed to conduct a summer program. This marks the beginning of the Playground Section of the Neenah Park & Recreation Department of today.

Between 1926 and 1931 the financing of the annual summer programs became the joint responsibility of the city and the Red Cross. In 1931 Armin Gerhardt took over as summer director. In that year, also, the first Pet and Hobby show was staged. Later Florence Oberreich guided the summer program to new heights.

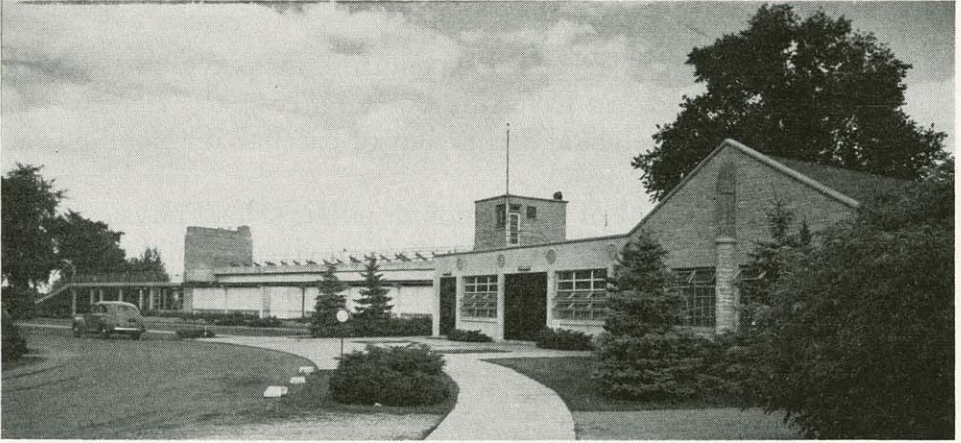
The Neenah swimming pool and “Rec” building were completed and opened to the public in 1940, with Paul Stacker as Manager, and Ole Jorgensen as Pool Supervisor. This facility added color to the expanding recreational program. Pool attendance for that year was 70,831—while the indoor, all year program drew a patronage of 22,142.

The National Women’s Championships, staged in the Neenah pool during August of 1942, still lives in the memories of thousands of local residents.

During the planning period, Ole Jorgensen did a thorough job of research on swimming pools, which facilitated the work of the architect, Thomas E. Tallmadge.

The property on which the pool is built was made available to the city by two citizens, C. B. Clark and S. F. Shattuck.

Coming down to 1947, the property south of the pool and recreation building was developed as a lighted softball park.



Recreation Building and Swimming Pool.

That year the total budget askings of the Park & Recreation Commission (including the swimming pool) were \$44,456.26, with estimated receipts of \$13,229.00 and net appropriation of tax monies of \$31,227.25.

Through the years, and particularly since early 1946, under the leadership of a full-time director, there has been steady development of a broad year-round program involving citizens of all ages.

Paul Stacker was the first full-time director of pool and recreation. Bill Miller has been full-time recreational director since October 1, 1948.

Compiled by Dr. J. M. Donovan



Golf Clubs

TRIBUTARY to Neenah and Menasha are the country clubs and golf courses, all of which have a close relationship to life of the Twin Cities.

The pioneer club, Riverview, of Appleton, is now surrounded by the growing city. When it was founded in the early years of the 20th century, it had a rural setting.

Butte des Morts Golf Club, west of Appleton.

Ridgeway—three miles west of Neenah.

North Shore, located on the north shore of Lake Winnebago.

The Appleton Municipal Golf Course and the Bridgewood course south of Neenah are in constant use by Twin City folk from May to October.



“The Grand Loggery soon became a landmark for every traveler on the Fox-Wisconsin waterway. From Lake Winnebago the boathouse at the water’s edge, the trim log buildings with shining windows under the majestic elms and maples, suggested a scene in a fairy story. As one landed and approached the Loggery, the illusion grew. Surely none but a New England hand had planted the low sweetbriar under the windows, the sweet william, mignonette, nasturtiums, and heartsease beside the latticed doorway. But the square hallway hung with fanciful Indian handiwork might have been a chieftain’s lodge. A papoose’s cradle hung by a broad beaded band, a warrior’s shirt—embroidered, fringed, and adorned with strings and wampum—baskets, trinkets, ceremonial attire, skins of otter, deer, and mink, crowded the small entrance.”

From Chapter 18 of Alice Elizabeth Smith’s biography of James Duane Doty, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, copyright 1954