

# historical analysis of park development

2012

## Historical Context

Beginning as a collection of small villages along the Niagara River in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the City of Niagara Falls exploded in population beginning in 1880 with the construction of the Hydraulic Canal and its associated hydropower production facilities. Cheap energy attracted many industries to the area, which attracted workers needing not only jobs, but also places to live.

Officially established as the City of Niagara Falls in 1892, the population of approximately 12,000 residents expanded throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to over 75,000 in 1930.<sup>1</sup> Boasting to be the “Power City of the World” and the electro-chemical center of the nation during that period, the city built roads, public utilities, and schools to serve the needs of the growing neighborhoods. What began as small clusters of dense development near the suspension bridge, and in the villages of Bellevue (to the north) and LaSalle (to the east), spread outwards to fill in the city limits by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While the city kept up with the physical infrastructure needed to accommodate industrialization and rapidly expanding neighborhoods, it struggled to come to terms with the role that parks and open space would play in the daily life of its residents. Other prosperous cities of the period, namely its neighbor Buffalo to the south, but also Boston, Rochester, Chicago, and Louisville, were already implementing grand plans for comprehensive park and boulevard systems designed decades earlier by Fredrick Law Olmsted, the most visionary and sought-after park planner of the time.

Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux had set precedents for city beautification and quality of life standards with their design of Central Park in New York City in 1857. Over the next thirty years, Olmsted went on to design some of the most impressive urban parks in the country, including Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, Chicago’s Jackson Park, and Boston’s Back Bay Fens. He also pioneered the concept of suburban town plans with wide, curving, tree-lined streets with his design of Riverside, a suburb of Chicago. Olmsted’s key role as planner of the grounds of the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 had a profound and lasting effect on urban design and open space planning, ushering in the City Beautiful Movement—a belief that urban beauty could promote civic harmony and virtue among its residents.

Olmsted first became involved with the City of Niagara Falls in the late 1860s. Concerned with the river’s waning flow, public inaccessibility, and the unsightly conditions due to industrialization, he and a small group of political and civic leaders founded the “Free Niagara” movement, which sought to restore the natural landscape of the falls and make it freely accessible to visitors. As a result of this effort, the Niagara Parks Commission was formed in 1883. Establishment of the Reservation followed in 1885 and construction of the Reservation (the first state park in the country) continued for the next 50 years, largely in keeping with the master plan developed by Olmsted and Vaux.

## Origins of Niagara Parks & Recreation

It is within this broader context at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the City of Niagara Falls started coming to grips with the need for a city park system. By 1900 the city’s population had grown to approximately 20,000, yet the city had no true municipal parks to call its own. Expanding rapidly as an industrial center and tourist destination, the city formally considered the development of a city-wide park system similar to that found in nearby Buffalo and other prosperous cities of the time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mizer, Hamilton B. *A City is Born, A City Matures: Niagara Falls, 1892-1932, A Topical History*. Niagara County Historical Society, No. 24, p. 49.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 2

Having optimistically looked into the cost in 1906, however, the city was disappointed to find that a comprehensive park plan prepared by the Olmsted Brothers--who took over the landscape architecture and park planning practice of their father--was “beyond the city’s purse” at the time.<sup>2</sup> The president of the city’s Park Commission, obviously committed to the idea, presented his own rough draft “of boulevards and small parks along the lines of the Buffalo park system.” This idea, however, which was largely based upon “acquiring land along the outskirts of the developed areas and connecting them with a system of park and highways,” was met with resistance as other commissioners were more in favor of acquiring property for small parks within a close walking distance of existing centers of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Whether due to disagreement, lack of political will, or scarcity of funds is unclear, but the city did not immediately act on either approach. Likely due to this inaction, Paul Schoellkopf, who was president of the very powerful and profitable Niagara Falls Power Company, took it upon himself to donate the land for what are generally recognized as the city’s first two public parks in 1913.<sup>4</sup> This included three acres for Schoellkopf Park, located along Portage Road between Pine and Walnut Streets, and 1.5 acres for Gluck Park, located along South Avenue between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets. A detailed description of Gluck Park is included later in this section.<sup>5</sup>

Schoellkopf, who evidently had great interest in public recreation and city beautification, served on the Niagara Parks Commission 1913-1914, and later became Chairman of the city’s Parks Commission. Whether due to his influence or that of others, limited support for a comprehensive park system study did finally materialize. In 1916 the Olmsted Brothers were hired by the city to prepare a study that described “a comprehensive system of parks for Niagara Falls.” The Olmsted Brothers must have understood, however, that the political climate of the period would not allow full or immediate implementation of their recommendations, so their study was mostly crafted to provide guidelines for gradual acquisition and development. In it, they state:

We submit the following report describing a comprehensive system of parks for Niagara Falls, with little expectation that it will be carried out in full at once, or even in the near future, but because we believe that with a complete and well-balanced project for a system of parks and parkways before them, the city officials will be better able than without such advice, to determine which particular parks and playgrounds and boulevards would best be acquired to begin with, and from time to time, and to discuss effectively with citizens interested in securing park benefits for the

---

2 Upon the retirement of Frederick Law Olmsted in 1895, his son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and his stepson, John Charles Olmsted, continued his landscape architecture practice as The Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects (OBLA). Both men had apprenticed in their father’s firm. Olmsted, Jr. carried on his practice until 1949. Within Niagara Falls, the Olmsted Brothers continued work on the Niagara Reservation (1900-1926), and designed the Hydraulic Power Company grounds (1913), and a private residential landscape for Henry Perky. Source: Lynda Schneckloth et al, *Olmsted in Buffalo and Niagara*. Buffalo: Urban Design Project, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Buffalo, 2011, p. 4.

3 Niagara Gazette, June 16, 1906.

4 Olympic Park, is the first known park within Niagara Falls. Established in the early 1900s as large athletic field, the park was located between Niagara Street and Ferry Avenue between 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Streets. It served as a venue for sporting events and eventually was developed with a large grandstand for viewing baseball games. Later it renamed Aluminum Park and served as the home field for the Aluminum Baseball Club. In 1921 it was renamed Power City Park and shortly thereafter Echo Park after it was leased by the Echo Club. The property was eventually sold to private investors and subdivided in 1924 for the sale of residential lots (Niagara Gazette, “Echo Park Sold and Will be Cut Up for Realty Development,” November 15, 1924).

5 Schoellkopf Park was sold by the city to the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center in the 1960s. While it still remains in use as a park, its size has been reduced due to infill development. Restoration of the park was completed in 2008.

neighborhood in which they happen to live, the broader aspects of the park problem based upon securing the greatest good for the greatest number of residents at the least cost.<sup>6</sup>

The Olmsted Brothers were in fact highly critical of what they deemed to be the “deplorable lack of city planning” within Niagara Falls. Whether Schoellkopf requested the Olmsteds to include scathing criticism in their official study or they offered it unsolicited is unknown, but they go on to state:

It is a pity that each of the many problems (associated with the city’s growth) essentially interrelated have been and will be either neglected or worked out with little regard to the best interests of the community as a whole and with little regard for the future. . . . It seems likely that what provision of parks and playgrounds is undertaken will be done in much the same haphazard way—not because a good project cannot be devised, but because it cannot in practice be carried out comprehensively, partly owing to human inertia, partly to the lack of adequate funds, partly to the absence of favoring laws and customs and partly to the great strength of other customs inimical to the success of measurably co-operative and altruistic community life.

It is hoped that this digression from the subject of a system of parks is excusable because it may serve to show the need of foresight in a community a deficiency in which leads to putting off the acquisition of land for parks and playground until the need is pressingly felt, by which time suitably located land is either unattainable, because covered with buildings, or only to be had at such great cost that inadequate areas are bought.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Olmsted Brothers Recommendations***

With their conscience clear, the Olmsted Brothers go on to offer their recommendations for a comprehensive park system, in which they call for a hierarchy of six types of open space. A brief discussion of each is provided below, as is an evaluation of its degree of implementation.

#### **1) Ornamental Squares: These include squares, triangles, and strips of land, set apart from streets and building land and improved to serve certain uses or simply to give pleasure to the eye.<sup>8</sup>**

As the Olmsteds stated, “Every city is more attractive for such small pleasure grounds, even if there is nothing to see on them but grass and a few trees.” Ornamental squares were believed to call attention to important public buildings and allow them to be seen “to good advantage.” Public squares also afforded city-dwellers a “refreshing feeling of spaciousness and of contrast with the confined and crowded streets” (OBLA, 10). Specifically, the Olmsteds recommended that the city acquire and develop the following:

- Central Square: A prominent and highly accessible parcel (not less than two blocks wide) was recommended to be located in an area between the retail district and the suspension bridge, extending from Main Street to Whirlpool Street somewhere between Willow and Ashland Avenues. This recommendation was not implemented and area was eventually developed and is now partially occupied by the Chilton Avenue-Orchard Parkway Historic District.

---

6 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 1.

7 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 6-7.

8 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 8.

# City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 4

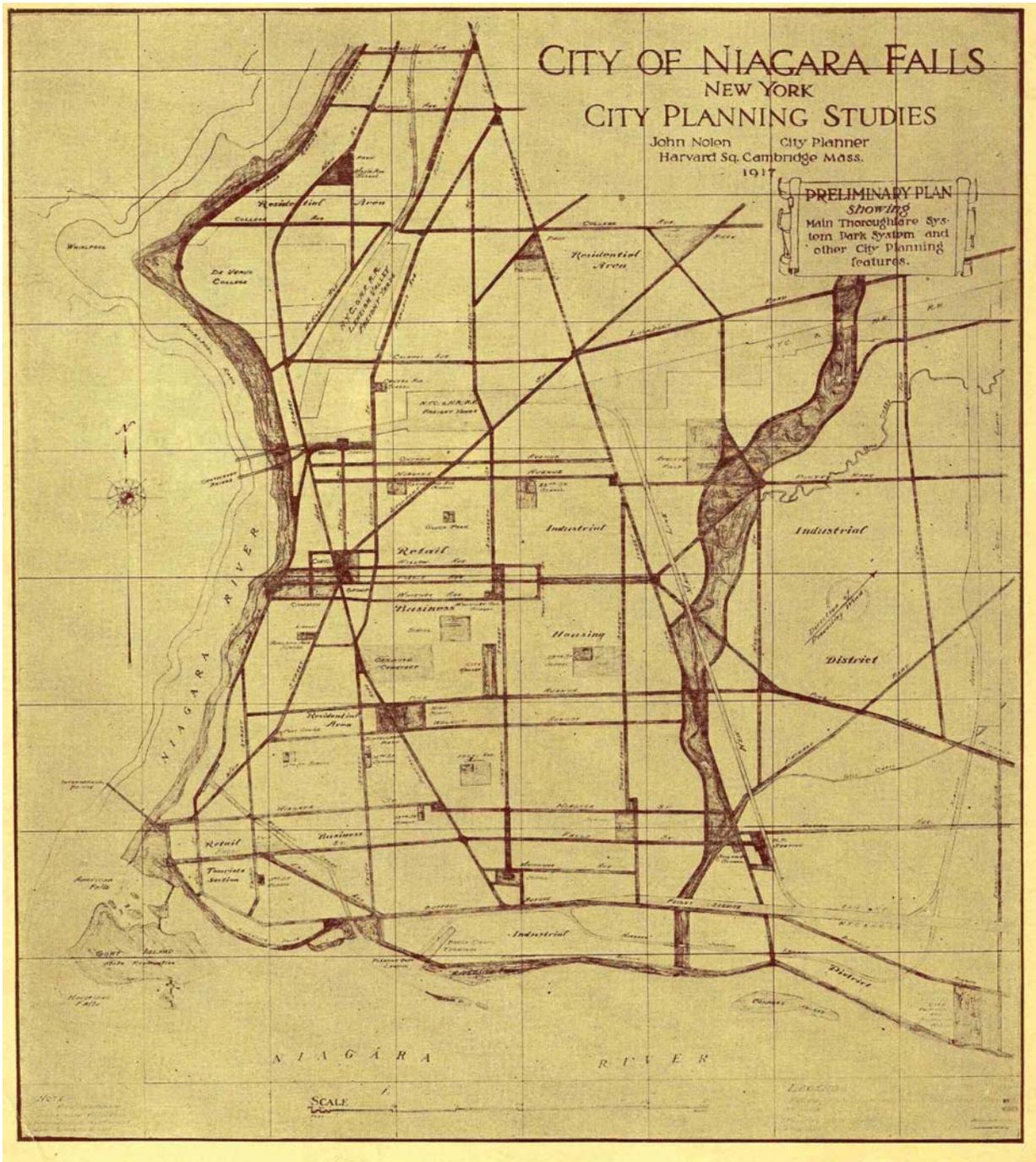


Figure 1: "Preliminary Plan Showing Main Thoroughfare System, Park System, and other City Planning Features," by John Nolan, city planner, 1917. This plan is bound in with the Olmsted Brothers' *Parks and Playground Studies*, though it does not reflect the entirety of their recommendations.

- Civic Center: A new public square, or “civic center,” located in the triangular area west of Main Street to Third Street and south of Pine Avenue, thereby giving the opportunity for city hall to be located with its axis on the center line of Fourth Street and facing the square.

At the time of the Olmsteds’ study, a small portion (1/6 acre) of this area was already recognized as a public park (though the parcel was privately owned by the Schoellkopf family). It was offered for sale to the city in 1926 for \$18,000 for dedicated use as a park. Apparently the deal did not materialize as the park was later donated by the Schoellkopf family to the Women’s Relief Corps, Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in the late 1920s.<sup>9</sup> City Hall was also not constructed adjacent to this open space as the city had already purchased property at Main and Cedar and decided to locate the building there.

- Falls Station Square: An ornamental square along North Street at what was then the proposed new union railroad passenger station on the line of the Erie Railroad. This recommendation was also not implemented.

It should be noted that while these recommendations as a whole were not implemented, both Gluck and Schoellkopf Parks were developed by this time. Both serve the purpose of the ornamental squares.

**2) Playground Parks: These are small parks assigned primarily to play, but generally having some portions beautified by landscape gardening.<sup>10</sup>**

Recognizing that the City of Niagara Falls had made great investments in their public school system, the Olmsted Brothers recommended that playground parks be located as close to a public school as possible. They also recommended that, whenever possible, a playground park should be bounded by streets on all sides unless one side can be bound on a school yard. Reasons for this included that it was believed better looking and more dignified, it was easier to light and police at night, and that some distance between rambunctious children and the surrounding residential homes would mitigate noise and views of “gymnastic apparatus.”<sup>11</sup>

Specifically, the Olmsteds recommended that playground parks be developed at the thirteen schools throughout the city. Of these, it appears that Bellevue Park, which was purchased by the city in 1922 to serve the needs of the Maple Avenue School (now Tom Mickljen Field), was carried out. The extent of implementation of the other recommendations is the subject of additional recommended research.

**3) Local Parks: These are usually improved as informal landscape garden and often crowded with features, but may be simple groves of trees and grass or open fields with few if any trees. The local park is distinguished from the large landscape park by the comparative smallness of the scale of its landscape and by the comparative conspicuousness of the surrounding houses from the interior of the park, and also by the excessive wear to which it is subjected because it is usually in a well-settled neighborhood.<sup>12</sup>**

9 Niagara Falls Gazette, “Memorials to Fallen Heroes Beautify Many Falls Parks,” September 1, 1951, p. 18:2.

10 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 8.

11 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 15.

12 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 8.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 6

Believing that local parks should regard landscape beauty and naturalistic plantings as the main characteristic, the Olmsteds also believed that they could, if needed, accommodate playgrounds, handball or squash courts, concert groves, bandstands, shelters, pergolas, swimming pools, athletic fields, greenhouses, zoological gardens and other types of outdoor recreation. Since the proximity of the Niagara Reservation was so close to the dense neighborhoods, they suggested that the city was in “less urgent” need of a local landscape park, and that the city would grow outwards to a large park located on the eastern side, which would accommodate these other types of recreation. They did, however, recommend that a local park be developed in the vicinity of Grass Island east of the hydraulic canal, where safe boating and bathing could take place.

This recommendation was carried out with the establishment of Porter Park, which was already under development at the time of the Olmsteds’ study. A detailed description of this park is included later in this section.

**4) Large Parks: These are almost always in the outskirts of a town or city. A large park should if possible, include one or more natural landscape features, such as a wooded ravine, a pond, a brook, a portion of a small river, a hill, a cliff, or best of all because most useful, a great stretch of fairly level meadow bordered by rolling higher ground.<sup>13</sup>**

The Olmsteds, following in the footsteps of their father, believed that “every city should have at least one large park if it is to be properly equipped.”<sup>14</sup> The essential characteristics of large parks were its size and the predominance of nature, which would afford visitors to “escape completely from city sights and sounds while enjoying the beauties of landscape that is so nearly natural as to be reasonably free from incongruous and inharmonious artificial features.”<sup>15</sup> Lakes, large meadows, and woodlands were all regarded as important and necessary components.

The Olmsteds recommended that a large “country” park be established in the outlying northeastern portion of the city far removed from the Niagara River, specifically “north of Pine, and east of Sugar Street, because the land is unimproved and there is a gentle valley which would lend itself to the formation of a park lake.”<sup>16</sup> Despite the size of the Niagara Reservation, they argued that the city needed a place where large meadows could accommodate field games, such as baseball, football, crickets, etc., and particularly golf, and where a safe boating lagoon could be created.

This recommendation was carried out with the establishment of Hyde Park, which was established in 1923 as a result of the donation of 316 acres of land along Gill Creek by Charles B. Hyde. A detailed description of this park is included later in this section.

**5) Reservations: These are sufficiently far out of town, and sufficiently large, to permit the landscape to be preserved in a comparatively wild condition...A reservation, in order to afford as complete a contrast with city conditions as practicable, should be as little artificialized as is consistent with the decent accommodation of visitors.<sup>17</sup>**

---

13 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 8.

14 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 23.

15 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 23

16 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 41.

17 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, “Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York,” 1917, p. 8-9.

Reservations were to be large tracts of land owned by the public primarily for the preservation of natural scenery. As the Niagara Falls Reservation was already in existence, due in large part to the work of Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted Brothers' continued efforts, they made a case for further preserving the Gorge below the falls all the way to Lewiston though they believed it to be unlikely.

This recommendation was also eventually carried out, although many years later, with the establishment of Whirlpool and Devils Hole State Parks in 1927, the city-owned Niagara Rapids Park in 1928 (since compromised),<sup>18</sup> and the Deveaux Woods State Park in 2001.

**6) Parkways: This designation includes boulevards. They are intended to provide agreeable approaches to parks and connections from one park to another. Parkways to be worthy of the name and to justify burdening the generally inadequate park funds with their maintenance, should be distinguished from ordinary streets and avenues by some park-like characteristics, usually greater breadth of turf strips and more rows of trees, and liberal set-back of houses. Hence they are to be much wider than streets, two hundred feet being perhaps the most common width.<sup>19</sup>**

Parkways and boulevards were to be better adapted for pleasure traffic than ordinary city streets, and it is with regard to these major investments that the Olmsteds made their most far-reaching recommendations. Here they called for a parkway along the crest of the Gorge and along the banks of the river above the existing Riverway, which would connect Niagara Falls with Buffalo.

They also recommended the construction of three major boulevards, which would form a "kite-shaped loop, so that people in automobiles could come one way and return the other, commanding while doing so the characteristic views of the Gorge and Falls, of the Rapids above the Falls, and of the broad, placid river above Goat Island, and incidentally getting a good idea of the great power houses and factories."<sup>20</sup> They also argued that these would serve as important fire breaks. Specifically, these recommendations called for:

- Converting Pine Avenue to a wide tree-planted boulevard from Sugar Street to Third Street.
- A new diagonal boulevard connecting the proposed "country park" at Sugar and Pine Streets with the Niagara Reservation, terminating near the Buffalo Avenue bridge over the hydraulic canal (it should be noted that much of the land platted east of Porter Road at the time was not yet developed).
- Widening Third Street from Spruce to Main, and then Main and Niagara to the International Bridge and the Niagara Reservation.

None of these recommendations were implemented. Eventually the Robert Moses Parkway was constructed in 1959. This was an 18-mile highway that followed the bluff of the river between LaSalle and Porter. It was originally conceived to connect Niagara Falls with the proposed Niagara Thruway (I-190), a spur of the New York State Thruway further to the north. However, due to the scale and speed of travel along the parkway, this road should not be considered in-keeping with the picturesque leisurely parkway

---

18 Niagara Falls Gazette, "City Parks System Dates Back to Schoellkopf Site," September 4, 1951, p. 24:4. Based upon Sandborn Maps dating to 1936, the Niagara Rapids Park occupied seven parcels facing Niagara Rapids Boulevard above the Gorge. This park stretched from College Avenue to McKinley Avenue. The integrity of this park was lost to the Robert Moses Parkway, although some open space remains.

19 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, "Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York," 1917, p. 8.

20 Olmsted Brothers: Landscape Architects, "Parks and Playgrounds for Niagara Falls New York," 1917, p. 42.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 8

envisioned by the Olmsteds. Alignment of the Parkway also obstructed access to and views of the river from the city and required filling in of the Hydraulic Canal and docks.<sup>21</sup>

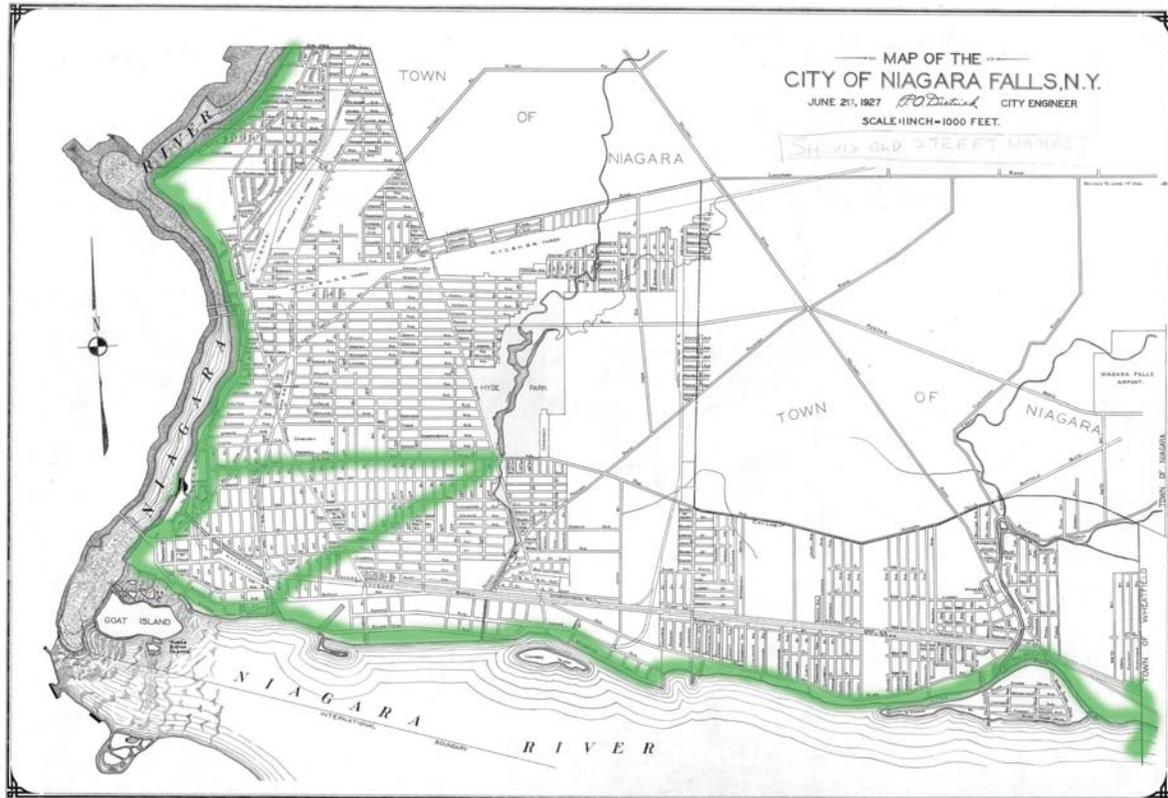


Figure 2: 1927 Map of the City of Niagara Falls showing extent of development at the time, overlaid with graphic illustration representing the Olmsted Brothers' 1917 recommendation for the city park and boulevard system.

The following section provides an in-depth look at the historical development of each park (where known), and identifies features that remain from its original construction. Where appropriate, the park is also evaluated for its conformity to the Olmsted Brothers' recommendations and guidelines for implementation of a comprehensive park system.

<sup>21</sup> Since its construction, a movement has been underway to do away with the Robert Moses Parkway. In the 1980s a portion of the parkway within Niagara Falls State Park was closed and largely removed in order to restore the park to the original layout. As a result, the parkway became discontinuous. Additional downgrading of the highway has occurred in other areas due to low usage and opponents of the parkway are actively pursuing total removal and landscape restoration.

**Park Historical Summaries**

**Lafayette Park**

Little information has been found concerning the historical development of this park. Sandborn maps dating to 1936 show this parcel was a park at the time the surrounding neighborhood was being built out. It is unlikely that the existing trees date to this period. No historical features were observed.

Historic features

None identified

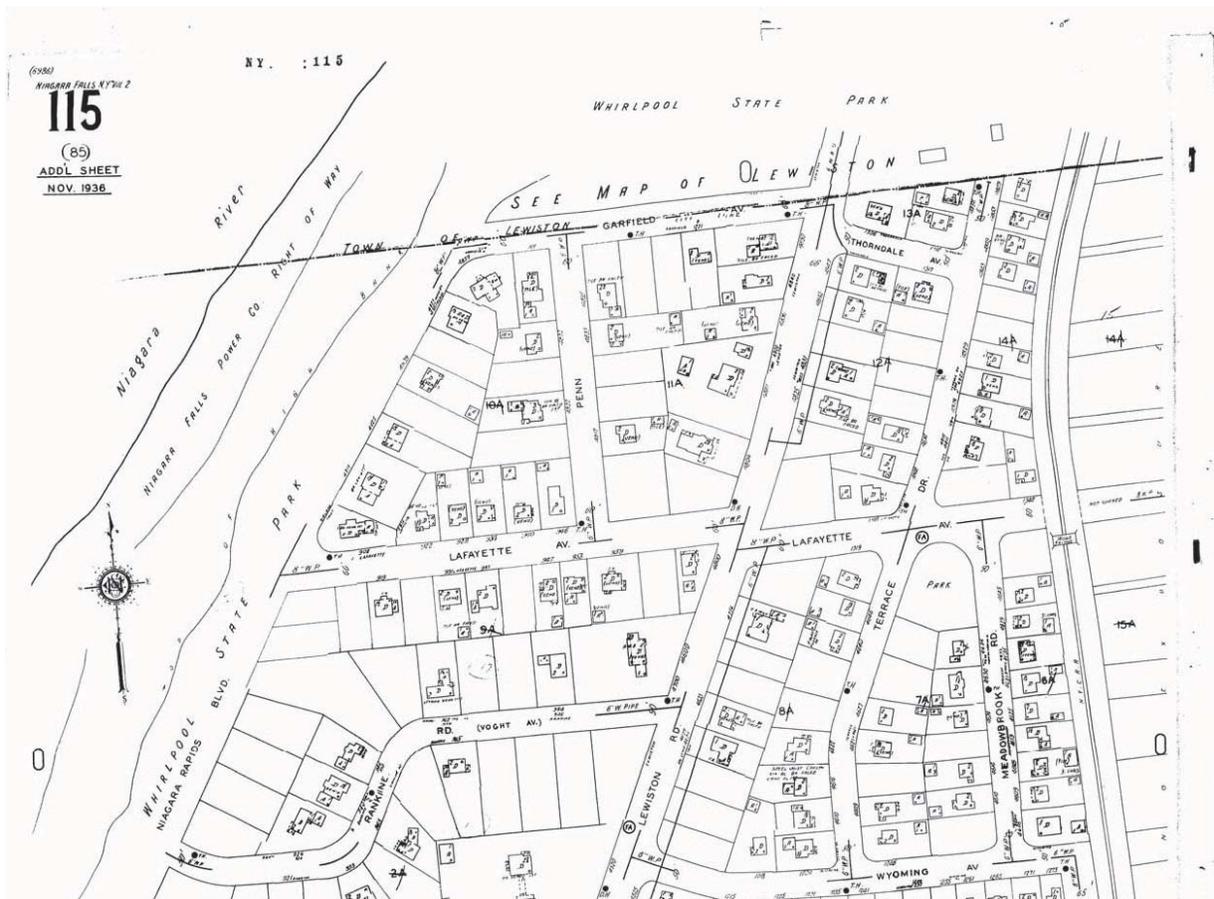


Figure 3: Sandborn Map showing location of Lafayette Park, 1936. Source: Sandborn Maps of Lewiston and Town of Niagara. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1942. Volume 2. Plate 115.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

### Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 10

#### **Tom Miklejn Field**

Historically this park was known as Bellevue Park. Purchased by the city in 1922, the 3.5 acre triangular park was established to serve the children of the Maple Avenue School and surrounding neighborhood (a recommendation of the Olmstead Brothers' 1916 park study). Originally, the park encompassed the entire triangular parcel bounded by Maple Avenue, Main Street, and McKoon Avenue. Newspaper accounts dating to 1951 indicate that the park was "one of the most spacious in the city with its towering trees and quiet atmosphere."<sup>22</sup> At some point following the park's establishment, the Rotary Club placed a tablet there honoring "living and dead" heroes associated with the Maple Avenue School.

A newspaper article documents that consideration was first given to clearing the park for creation of a softball field and shuffleboard facilities in 1959.<sup>23</sup> It is likely that the ballfield currently situated along Maple Avenue was developed after that time and likely dates to the late 1960s or early 1970s as it does not appear in the 1966 aerial photo. The date of clearing for the area now occupied by the football field is unknown. A sign in front of the school's historic façade states that the Thomas F. Miklejn Memorial Field was dedicated in 2001.

Based upon aerial photos dating to 1966, large street trees lined Lewiston Road and Maple Ave, and a large grove of trees occupied the triangular area north of the school (now a parking lot). While all the trees along Lewiston Road have since been removed, it is likely that the trees lining Maple Avenue likely date to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is not known if the area currently dedicated as a playground was historically used as such.

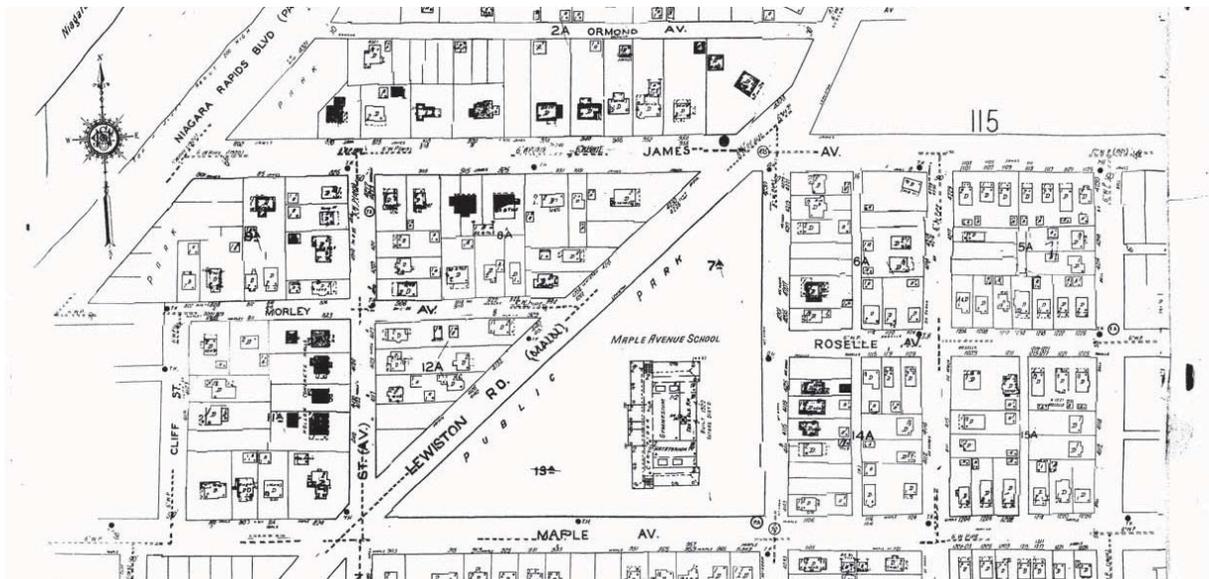


Figure 4: Sandborn Map showing location of Bellevue Park (now Tom Miklejn Field), 1936. Source: Sandborn Maps of Lewiston and Town of Niagara. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1942. Volume 2. Plate 115.

22 Linda Grace, "Park System Vital to City Growth, Health, Niagara Falls Gazette, Oct 8, 1967, pg.2.  
23 Niagara Falls Gazette, "Bellevue Park Plan Gets More Opposition," April 13, 1959.

Historic features

Street trees lining Maple Avenue

Added and Altered features:

Ballfield

Fencing

Miklejn Memorial Field dedication sign

Parking lot north of school

Missing or removed historic features

Rotary Club memorial tablet

Street trees along Lewiston Road

Groves of trees within park



Figure 5: 1966 Aerial photo.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 12

### Highland & Beech (Planned)

Sandborn maps dating to 1914 show this property as partially platted with residential lots, though apparently unbuilt. Immediately to the west of the park property was a book manufacturing facility belonging to Moore Business Forms, Inc., American Book Sales Company Division, Counter Book Check Manufacturing. The large structure included the manufacturing areas, press room, offices, storage rooms, and carbon paper coating area (all demolished sometime after 1978).

It should be noted that the existing buildings directly to the northeast of the park property were part of the U.S. Light and Heating Company. These included a lead foundry and several battery formation shops. As documented in the *Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Industrial Reconnaissance Survey*, a study prepared for the city in 2007, the U.S. Light and Heating Company is the oldest surviving industrial complex in the City of Niagara Falls. The study states:

The U. S. Light & Heating Company (USL) began construction on its extensive two-story brick factory here in 1910 and continued to expand it through the end of the decade. Most of the buildings of this period appear to have been little altered; thus this plant has great significance as perhaps the most intact industrial complex remaining in the City of Niagara Falls. The firm originally manufactured lighting devices, storage batteries, electric self starters for automobiles & electric welders, but later shifted to batteries exclusively. In 1942 the facility became the Auto-Lite Battery Corporation, and then Prestolite in 1964. Production in the southern section of the complex evidently had ceased by 1980. The Tulip Corporation, which manufactures battery industry products with recycled plastic, now occupies the northern section of the facility, and the south section is vacant and owned by the city. The entire complex should be documented and evaluated for reuse.<sup>24</sup>

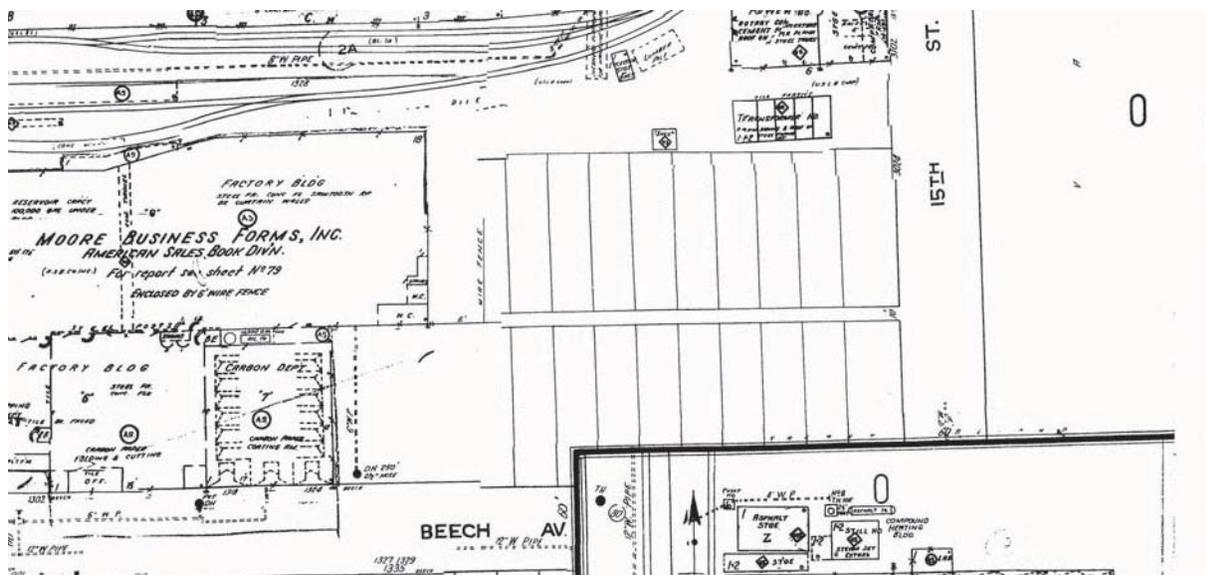


Figure 6: Sandborn Map showing location of Highland and Beech, 1936. Source: Sandborn Maps of Lewiston and Town of Niagara. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1942. Volume 2. Plates 79-80.

Historic features

None determined.

Missing or removed historic features

None determined.



Figure 7: 1978 Aerial photo showing Highland & Beech and D'Amelio Parks.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 14

### ***D'Amelio Park***

Dedicated in the early 1980s as D'Amelio Park, the park previously known as Center Court Park was established in the mid-1960s. Located within a predominantly African-American community, it originally encompassed the entire block surrounded by Beech Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Street, 17<sup>th</sup> Street, and Centre Avenue, and contained a swimming pool, wading pool, and basketball court in the far southwestern corner. All remaining areas appear to have been open fields.

Renovations in the 1990s added a playground and tot lot, a combination soccer-football field, a picnic area, baseball field, two handball courts and two parking lots accommodating 45 automobiles. The date of origin of the bandshell is unknown, though it was built after 1978. Recent infill of government-funded housing and associated stormwater detention ponds within the surrounding area has since caused the loss of the surrounding recreation fields.

#### Historic features

Swimming Pool  
Wading Pool  
Basketball Court

#### Added and Altered features:

Playground  
Tot lot  
Handball court  
Parking lots  
Bandshell

Missing or removed historic features  
Recreation fields

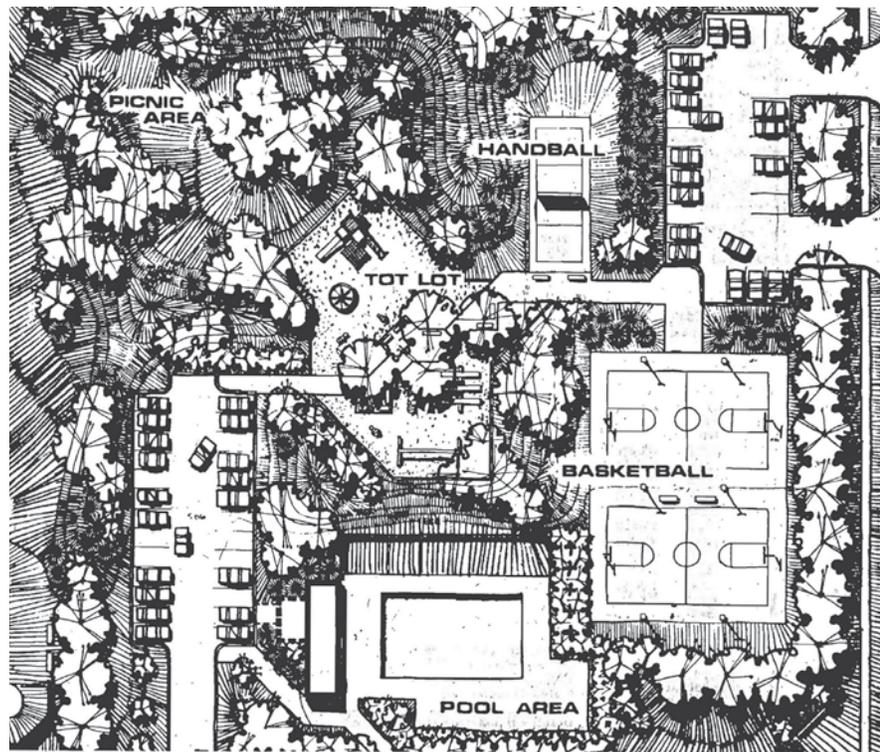


Figure 8: 1980 drawing showing proposed improvements for D'Amelio Park.  
Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.

**North & Lockport**

Historic maps Sandborn maps dating to 1936 show this park property as subdivided for residential lots, though they were not developed at the time. A 1978 aerial photograph indicates that some sort of improvement (most likely a basketball court) was located in the far west end of the park property although the original date of construction is unknown. Traces of this court area remain, although it has been overgrown with grass and weeds.

Historic features

None identified

Added and Altered features:

Playground equipment and other recreational features (benches, picnic tables, etc.)

Picnic shelter

Concrete paths

Missing or removed historic features

None identified



Figure 9: 1978 Aerial photo showing Lockport Park.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 16

### Gluck Park

Historically, Gluck Park was leased by the city for use as a playground.<sup>25</sup> Although the city was interested in purchasing the parcel but perhaps unable to afford the \$11,000 asking price, the Schoellkopf family purchased the land from then owner George W. Wallace in 1913 for \$11,000. The Schoellkops then donated the deed to the city and named it Gluck Park for Jessie Gluck Schoellkopf, the wife of Arthur S. Schoellkopf.<sup>26</sup>

Approximately 1.3 acres in size, Gluck Park was originally designed by Charles Aigner, Park Superintendent of the time (see brief biography at end of this study), with a formal double walk leading off of 15<sup>th</sup> Street and flanked by a pair of stone pillars, similar to what was erected in Schoellkopf Park. The paths were likely paved with stone dust, also similar to the treatment at Schoellkopf.

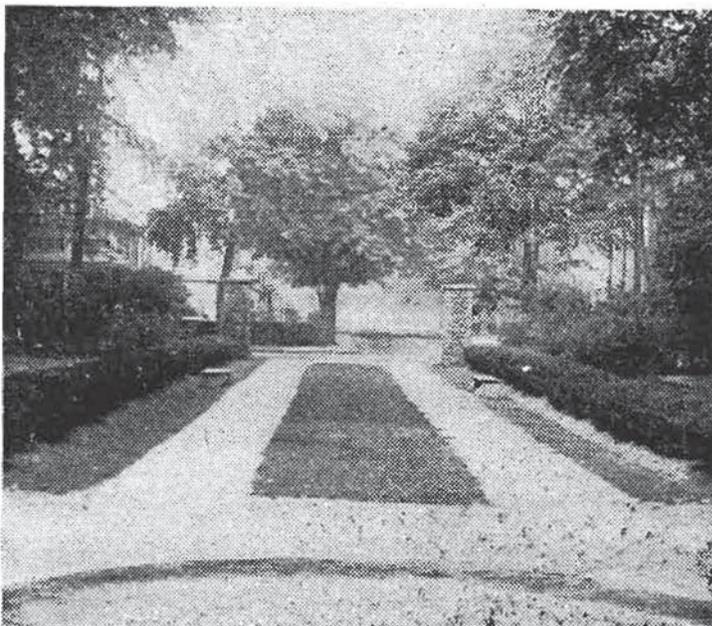


Figure 10: Photograph of Gluck Park. Source: Niagara Falls Gazette, September 1, 1951, P. 18.2.

A historic plan of the park from 1938 shows manicured shrubs flanking the formal double walk on both sides, as well as along the sides of both diagonal paths leading to 16<sup>th</sup> Street. In the center of the park was a circular path that originally enclosed a fountain (this was removed by 1929 and was replaced by a large flower bed). From this center circle, four diagonal paths radiated out to the four corners of the park. According to a 1918 news article, the park was described as “an expanse of inviting greensward, dotted with shady trees that are now nearly thirty feet in height, and under whose spreading branches hundreds of north end folk daily find comfort and cool enjoyment.”<sup>27</sup>

Today the park maintains the historic double walk, circular central path, and four diagonal paths, but several features have been added and some historic features are missing. The existing playground, basketball court, and bandshell were likely added sometime after 1950. Only one pillar stands today. A bronze tablet inscribed with the names of the Schoellkopf family was originally mounted to one of the stone pillars, but this has since been lost to theft or vandalism. This tablet was inscribed with the following:

Gluck Park. This park was presented to the people of the city of Niagara Falls by Jessie Gluck Schoellkopf, Beatrice S. Schwill, and Paul A. Schoellkopf in memory of Arthur

25 Niagara Falls Gazette, “Our Park System,” April 17, 1929, p. 8:5.

26 Niagara Falls Gazette, “Memorials to Fallen Heroes Beautify Many Falls Parks,” September 1, 1951, p. 18:2.

27 Niagara Falls Gazette, “Niagara Falls is Taking Precedence as a City of Parks and Shady Nooks,” July 17, 1918, P. 7:1.

Schoellkopf. Accepted March 11, 1913. Park commissioners, William Laughlin, mayor; Paul Schoellkopf, James Traverse, Nathan Hirsch, J. Curtis Crossman.<sup>28</sup>

Gluck Park is significant as it is the oldest public park within Niagara Falls still in existence.<sup>29</sup> While less formal than its original design, the basic elements of its circulation system are still intact, as are many of the historic structures that frame the park and give it context, including two churches. Its integrity has been compromised however, with the loss of several elements, including the northern stone column, formal shrubbery, central fountain, and large shade trees, as well as the addition of the basketball court and other non-historic elements.

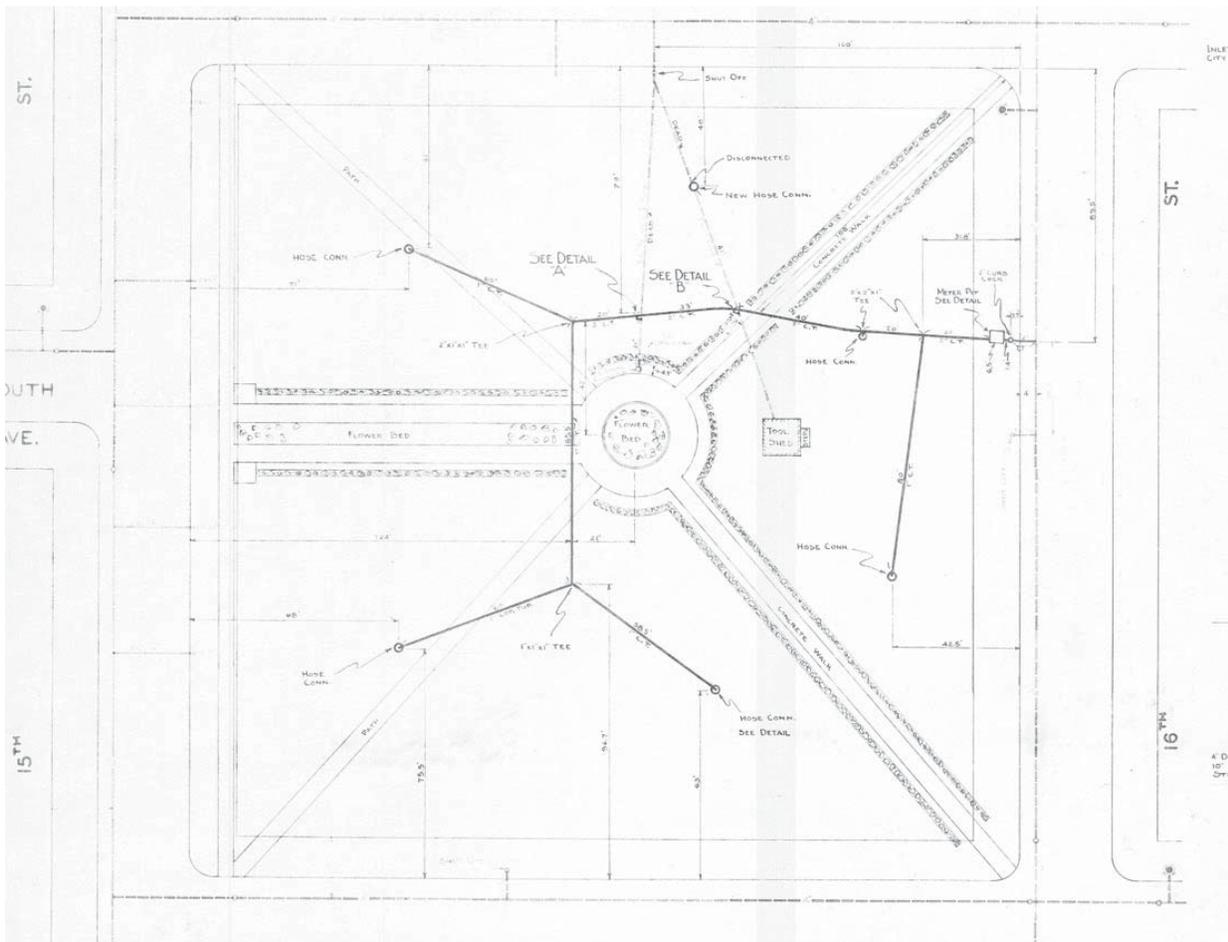


Figure 11: 1938 Water Plan for Gluck Park, showing conditions at the time. Source: Niagara Falls, Archives of the City Engineer.

28 Niagara Falls Gazette, July 17, 1936, p. 4:1.

29 Schoellkopf Park was established the same year as Gluck Park, but it is currently in private ownership.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 18

### Historic features

Double entry walk

Circular path in center

Stone column (south)

Large sycamores along park periphery

### Added and Altered features:

Playground

Basketball Court

Shrubs in island between entry walk

Large boulder in center

Bandshell

### Missing or removed historic features

Stone column (north)

Memorial plaque on south column

Shrubs lining central walk and diagonal paths leading to 16<sup>th</sup> Street

Central fountain

Large grove of trees within park

**Legends Basketball Court**

Formerly used as a freight yard for the Erie Railroad since the late nineteenth century, the current track, and tennis courts date to the late 1960s or early 1970s after the tracks were removed. A playground was located in the area now occupied by the school parking lot north of the track. A basketball court was once located in the north end of the interior track field, but this has since been removed. The basketball courts located in the center of the running track are recent additions.

Historic features

None identified, although archeological features dating to the former use of the property as a rail freight yard may exist.

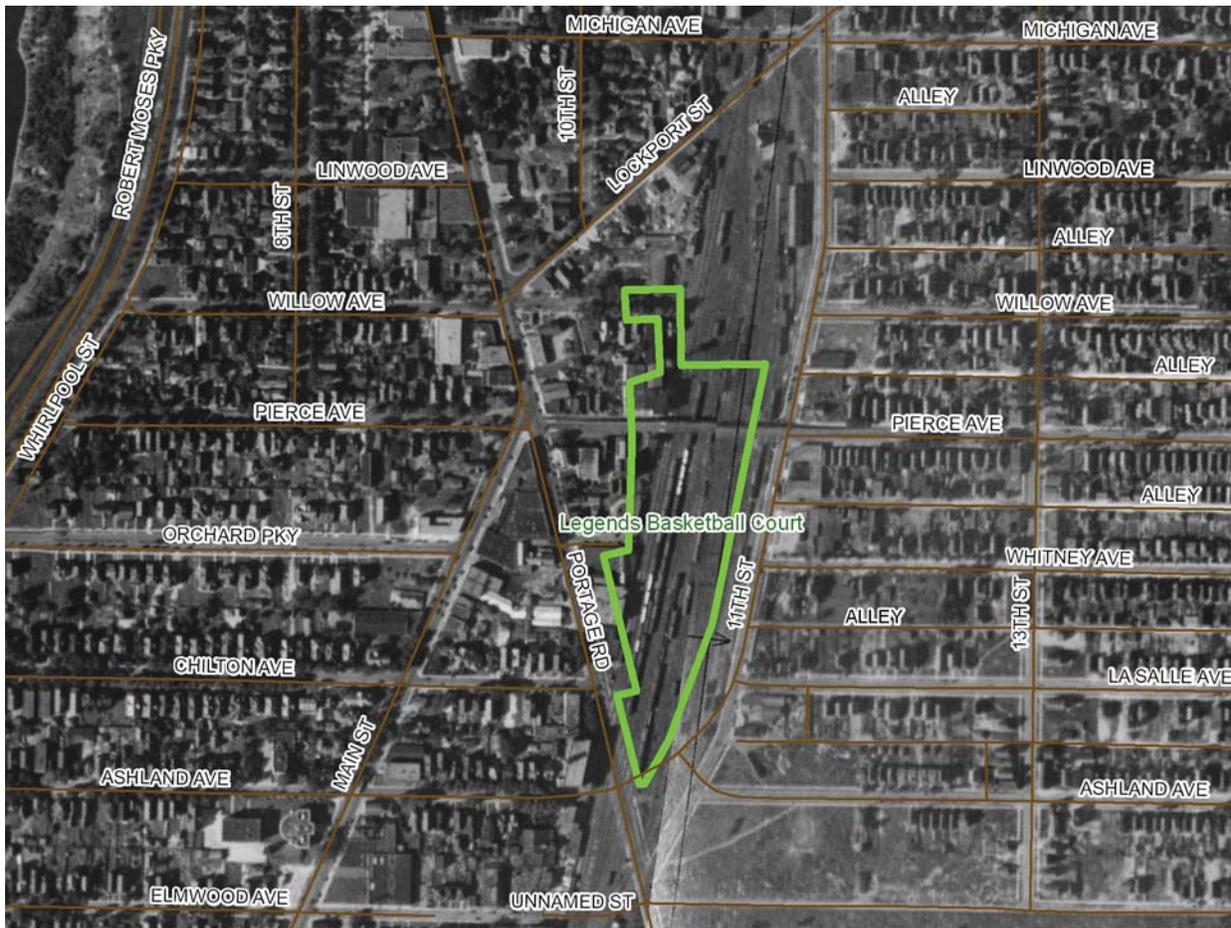


Figure 12: 1927 Aerial photo showing former railyard.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 20

### DiFranco Park

DiFranco Park was established in 1965. It was named after Thomas J. DiFranco, former city parks director. The land for the park was originally donated to the city by the State Power Authority. It originally contained a playground, wading pool and basketball courts and served the surrounding local neighborhood.<sup>30</sup> Currently the site is undergoing construction for the nearby road infrastructure project, and most all of the park's original features have been removed except for a small comfort station and path in the southeast corner.

#### Historic features

None identified



Figure 13: 1966 Aerial photo showing DiFranco Park.

### Statue of Liberty

Originally this 15-foot statue, which is an exact replica of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor, was located in Hyde Park across from former Gaskill Junior High School (now Gaskill Preparatory School). It was placed in the park in 1951 and presented to the city by the Niagara Falls Moose Lodge and the Niagara Frontier Council of Boy Scouts. Its commemorative plaque reads:

With the faith and courage of their forefathers who made possible the freedom of these United States  
The Boy Scouts of America  
dedicate this copy of The Statue of Liberty as a pledge of everlasting fidelity and loyalty.  
The Crusade to strengthen Liberty, 1951

In 1986 the statue was removed. In 2011, the statue was restored by Youngstown sculptor Susan Geissler, and then moved to its current location near the approach to Rainbow Bridge.<sup>31</sup> In 1998 the empty pedestal in Hyde Park was used as the base of the current statue, created by sculptor David Poulin, which commemorates volunteerism.



#### Historic features

Sculpture and commemorative plaque

#### Missing or removed historic features

Stone base (still in Hyde Park)

Figure 14: Photograph of Statue of Liberty in its original location in Hyde Park, date unknown. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.

31 Michele DeLuca, "The 'Lady' is Looking Good," The Tonawanda News, Aug 25, 2011.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 22

### **South Junior Playground**

The South Junior Playground was likely established in association with the South Junior High School after it was constructed in 1922. However, aerial photos from the 1970s show that the play area was located directly south of the school, and not in its current location along Ferry Ave.

#### Historic features

None identified



Figure 15: 1927 Aerial photo showing the South Junior High School and playground to the south. Note Schoellkopf Park, located directing to the northwest.

**Liberty Park**

Little information is known about this park. The parcel is identified as a park in maps dating to 1934. Elmwood Road originally formed the northern boundary, but since has been partially removed and replaced with grass. The original brick paving is evident on the east side. It is likely the large sycamore trees along the north boundary date to the park's early construction.

Historic features

Sycamore trees



Figure 16: 1927 Aerial photo showing Liberty Park.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 24

### **Jerauld Park**

Little information is known about this park, which is comprised of 11 contiguous parcels. Maps dating to 1936 show these lots as undeveloped as the neighborhood was just starting to fill out. The basketball court dates to at least 1978. The dates of origin of the playground and ballfield are unknown.

#### Historic features

None identified



Figure 17: 1978 Aerial photo showing Jerauld Park.

### Hyde Park

Whether Charles B. Hyde was aware of or instrumental to the Olmsted Brothers' 1916 recommendation that his land be acquired by the city for dedication of a large "county" park containing recreational fields, a golf course, and a safe boating lagoon is unknown, but as a wealthy and well connected industrialist who worked his way up to become part owner of the Niagara River Manufacturing Company, it is likely that Mr. Hyde and Paul Schoellkopf were well acquainted.

Given Mr. Schoellkopf's position as chairman of the Park Commission, it is certainly possible that Mr. Hyde's will, which stipulated that his estate go entirely to the city for the purpose of creating a public park, was written with some knowledge of the city's strategic interest in his land. When Mr. Hyde died in 1921 he left his entire estate of 316 acres, located east of Sugar Street (now Hyde Park Boulevard) to the city with a stipulation that the park be created in his name and a memorial erected in his honor.

Between 1921 and 1925 the city acquired additional lands around Hyde's property to enlarge the park area, though donations and condemnations continued for many years after.<sup>32</sup> A master plan for the park was prepared in the 1921 by Harries & Hall, Landscape Architects and Engineers of Buffalo.<sup>33</sup> However, the plan as originally prepared deviates from what was eventually built, so it is not known if the plan was later updated by Harries & Hall (the most likely scenario), or if another designer of the period consulted on the project. It may be possible that Devilla Wood, who served as Superintendent of Parks during this period, also contributed to the updates. Evolution of the plan is the subject of additional recommended research.

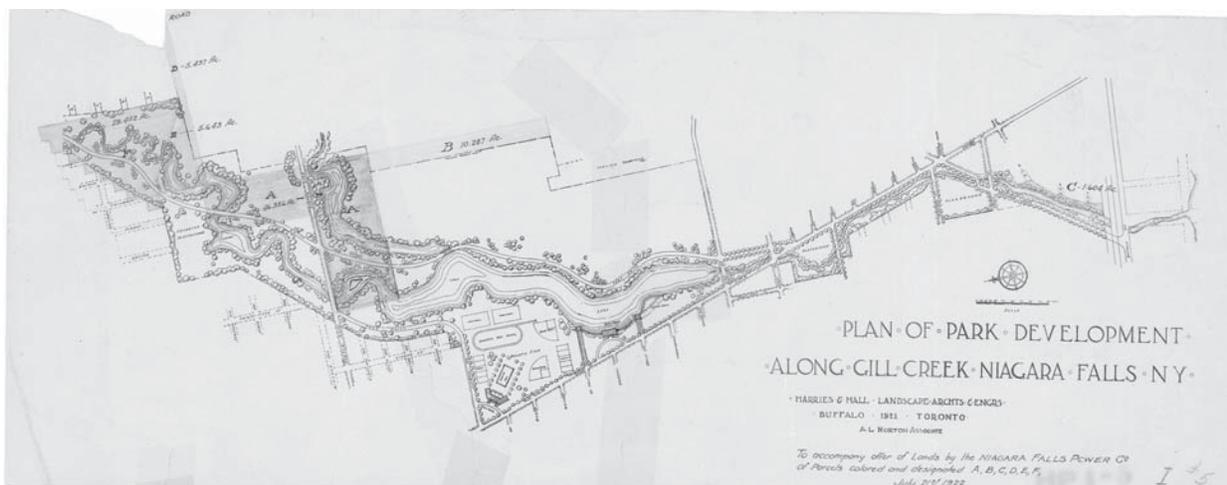


Figure 18: 1921 Plan of Park Development along Gill Creek (Hyde Park) by Harries and Hall, Landscape Architects and Engineers. Source: Niagara Falls, Archives of the City Engineer.

32 Sculli, Nicolas J. "Hyde Park, 1921 to 1941," November 20, 1976 (in partial fulfillment of Niagara University Credit, History 398; Dr. Mogavero advisor).

33 William Harries became superintendent of the New York State Reservation at Niagara Falls 1911-1912. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Forgotten+landscape+architectural+firm+of+Harries,+Hall+and+Kruse+of...-a030235619>

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

### Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 26

In any case, the role of Harries & Hall is significant as the firm established quite a regional portfolio in western New York, particularly in the area of golf course design (Byrncliff, Sheridan Park, and Elma, Brookfield and Niagara Frontier are a few the other courses designed by Harries).<sup>34</sup> Harries was evidently very well connected with other designers and city officials of the day, as he served as superintendent of the New York State Reservation at Niagara Falls from 1910 to 1912. He also served as Superintendent of Parks for the City of Buffalo from 1917 to 1922.

Actual construction of the park began in 1925 with the establishment of a large stone comfort station and shelter house, which was designed by architect Robert White. This structure was strategically located to serve not only park visitors, but also tourists who camped in the adjacent field area between it and Pine Avenue. This field was designated as Camp Jones, a “municipal tourist camp” or automobile stopover for visitors driving to town to see Niagara Falls.<sup>35</sup>

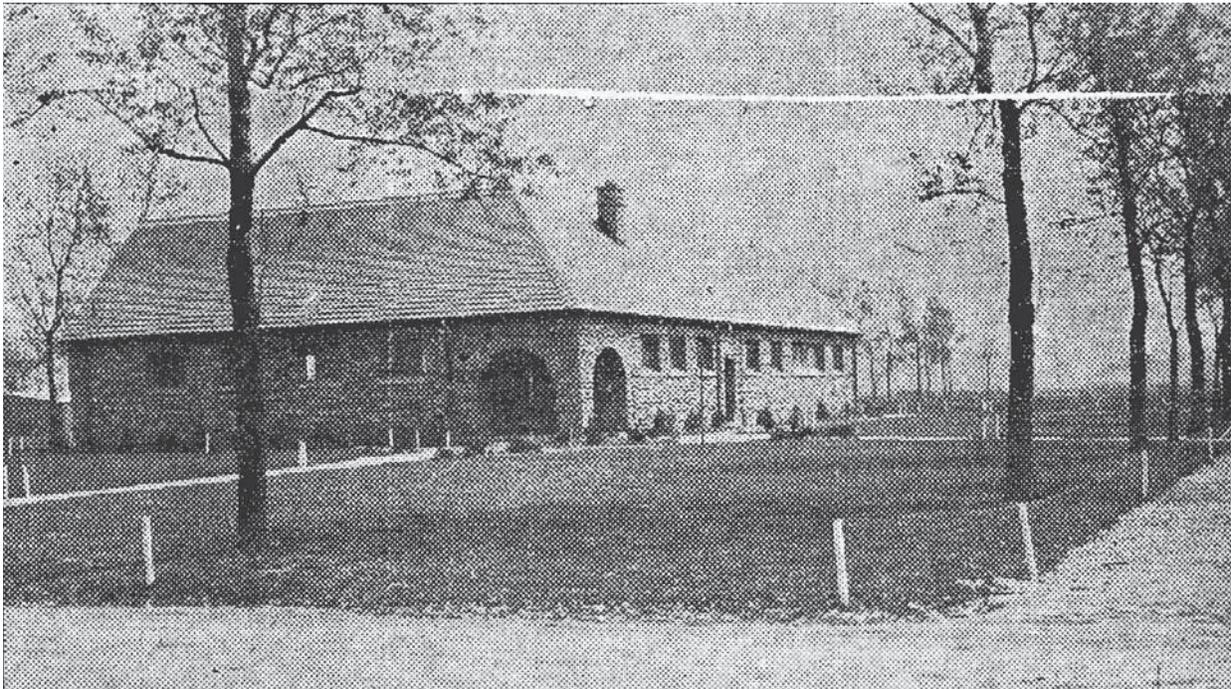


Figure 19: Photo of comfort station shortly after construction. Source: Niagara Falls Gazette, May 24, 1927, p. 17:2.

34 Ronald S. Montesano, “More of WNY’s best golf courses,” *Buffalo Spree: The Magazine of Western New York*, September/October, 2006.

35 Mizer, Hamilton B. *A City is Born, A City Matures: Niagara Falls, 1892-1932, A Topical History*. Niagara County Historical Society, No. 24, p. 6, 82.

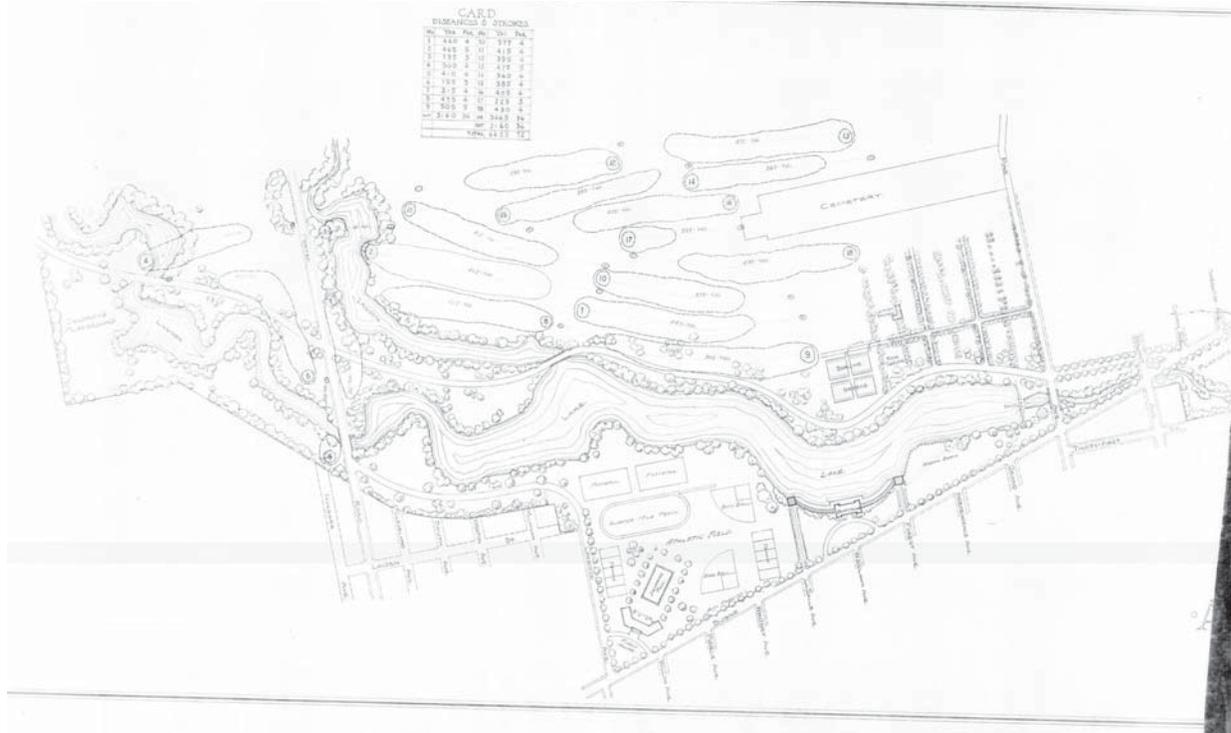


Figure 20: Plan of golf course within Hyde Park by Harries and Hall, Landscape Architects and Engineers (date unknown but likely ca. 1921-25). Source: Niagara Falls, Archives of the City Engineer.

The 18-hole golf course, designed by Harries & Hall, was constructed in 1926 and opened to the public in 1927—the first in the city. In 1928 the Niagara Falls Power Company donated another 58 acres of adjacent land, which at the time was 20 percent of the total park area. By 1930 the park included Hyde Park Lake (created by flooding the area along the Gill Creek lowlands and encompassing approximately 42 acres, 21), a bridge, baseball and soccer fields, tennis courts, football and cricket fields, a rose garden (with a pergola and stone seat overlooking a small pond), two bowling greens, quoit courts, an archery range, and children’s playground, as well as a small sunken garden on the corner of Hyde Park Boulevard and Pine Avenue that included a 16 foot obelisk with a sundial and bronze memorial tablet commemorating Hyde.<sup>36</sup>

Major improvements were made to the park in 1932, which were the result of emergency and relief funds from federal and state authorities. These included a new swimming pool, which was one of the largest outdoor pools in the state at the time, a wading pool for young children, including an associated stone comfort station, four new tennis courts, and a new municipal stadium designed to seat 5,000 people (this was enlarged to seat 15,000 in 1934). In 1937 it became the largest illuminated athletic field in the United States at the time.<sup>37</sup> Plans also called for a boathouse, bathing beach, and bathing pavilion on Hyde Park Lake. The lakeshore was used as a bathing beach for a time, but the other structures were never constructed.

36 Sculli, Nicolas J. “Hyde Park, 1921 to 1941,” November 20, 1976 (in partial fulfillment of Niagara University Credit, History 398; Dr. Mogavero advisor), 14.

37 Sculli, Nicolas J. “Hyde Park, 1921 to 1941,” November 20, 1976 (in partial fulfillment of Niagara University Credit, History 398; Dr. Mogavero advisor), 19, 22, 27.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 28



Figure 21: Photo of Hyde Park Lake, showing area used as bathing beach and original treatment of bridge, 1931. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.



Figure 22: Photo of Hyde Park Golf Course along Porter Road, July 1931. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.

By 1935 the park added a new putting green near the comfort station, an additional nine hole golf course adjacent to Porter Road, a bridle path around the lake, and another shelter house in the vicinity of the eighth hole of the new golf course.<sup>38</sup> A bridge connecting Duck Island to the mainland was also constructed around this time, and the island was equipped with canoe holdings and park benches, as well as extensive ornamental plantings. In addition to summer activities, the island and surrounding lagoon also hosted ice skating in the winter.

In 1935 construction documents and planting plans were drawn up for another large ornamental garden, the "Iris Bowl," which was to be located north of the bowling greens (in the vicinity of the existing shuffleboard courts). This formal garden was to have an elevated flagstone viewing platform, which was to be on axis with the overlook on the south side. It is unclear, however if this feature was ever built as no trace remains--it does not appear in plans dating to the early 40s. In 1936, the city decided not to continue to host the Hyde Park Tourist Camp and the area between the comfort station and Pine Street reverted to exclusive use of Niagara Falls citizens, particularly children and picnickers.<sup>39</sup>

The open-air concert pagoda on Duck Island was constructed in 1937. Memorial markers, in the form of bronze plaques and commemorative trees, were placed in the vicinity of the Rose Garden in 1938. Since the golf course began and ended near the comfort station, the building was expanded in 1940 to include a clubhouse containing a restaurant, kitchen, and pro-shop, and offices for the municipal golf course officials. By this year it was estimated that over 500,000 people were participants or spectators in park events.<sup>40</sup> By 1951, that estimate rose to over 700,000.<sup>41</sup>

Hyde Park underwent major improvements in the early 1960s. A new clubhouse was constructed in 1963 and another nine holes were added to course north of Porter Road to make two 18-hole courses (connected by an underpass). This expansion was paid for by the NY State Power Authority as a partial payment for the destruction of the course due to the construction of two power lines on the eastern side of the park. The putting green was moved around this time and new parking lots were constructed in the location of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes. The lower course was also reconfigured somewhat. Consequently, these improvements shifted the focus of golf activities further to the north and reduced the role of the historic comfort station as a clubhouse. By this time, the city had also acquired additional lands north of the stadium for use as ballfields.

In the 1960s, the park also added a sledding hill and miniature bike track (since removed), running track, golf driving range, and several additional ball fields on the far eastern end of the park. A third bowling green north of historic greens was also likely developed at this time.<sup>42</sup>

Around this same time, the Rose Garden was renovated by the Niagara Falls Garden Club and Keep Niagara Beautiful, Inc., a division of the Niagara Falls Area Chamber of Commerce. Led by Fred White, the group added approximately 600 new rose plantings to bring the total up to around 2,500, which were

---

38 Sculli, Nicolas J. "Hyde Park, 1921 to 1941," November 20, 1976 (in partial fulfillment of Niagara University Credit, History 398; Dr. Mogavero advisor), 22.

39 Sculli, Nicolas J. "Hyde Park, 1921 to 1941," November 20, 1976 (in partial fulfillment of Niagara University Credit, History 398; Dr. Mogavero advisor), 26.

40 Niagara Gazette "Municipal Park System Compares Favorably with City's of Size in State." December 30, 1939.

41 Niagara Gazette. James W. Dornan, "Inside City Hall" September 15, 1951.

42 "Recreation Department facilities at Hyde Park." Map showing plan of Hyde Park, no date (ca. 1970).

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 30



Figure 23: Photo of Pedestrian Bridge to Duck Island, 1986. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.



Figure 24: Photo of Rose Garden, 1931. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.



Figure 25 (left): Photo of Archery Range, 1931. Figure 26 (right): Photo of Bowling Greens, 1931. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.

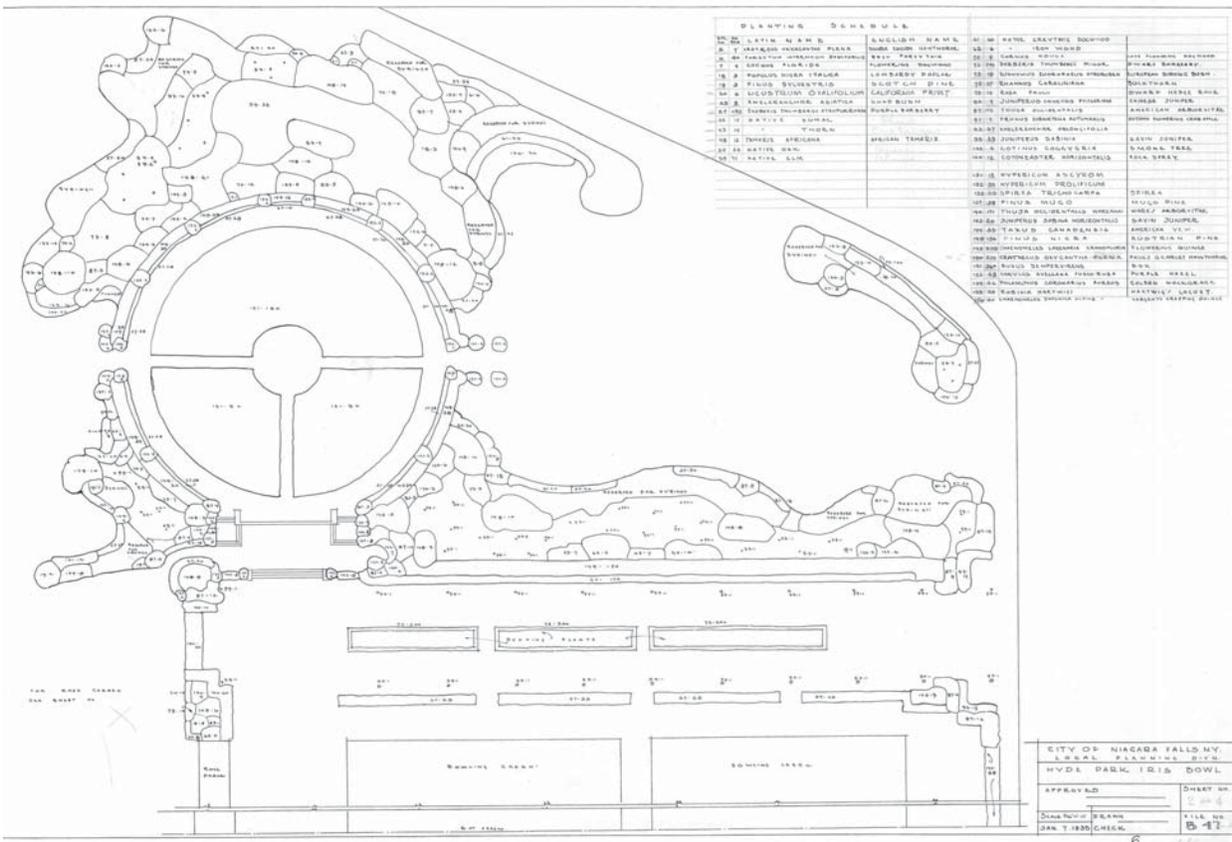


Figure 27: Planting plan showing the Iris Bowl, 1935, which was to be located between the bowling greens and Robbins Drive. It is unclear if this was ever built. Source: Niagara Falls, Archives of the City Engineer.

# City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

## Historical Analysis of Park Development

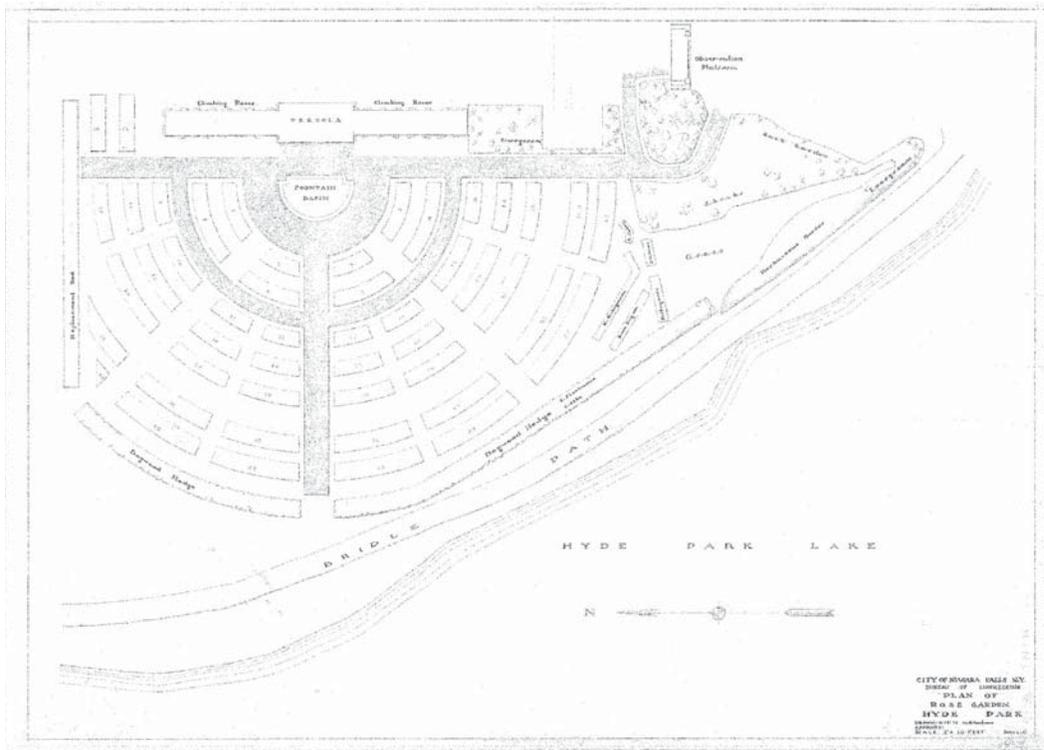
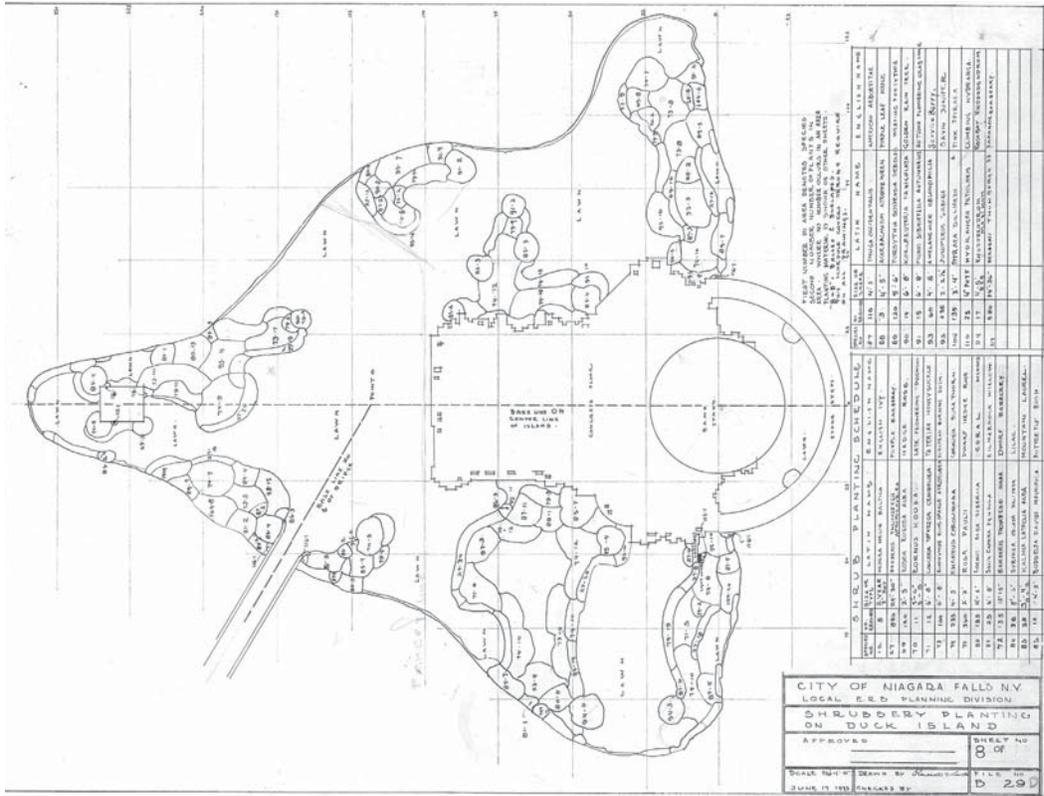


Figure 28 (top): Planting plan of Duck Island, 1935; Figure 29 (bottom): Layout plan for Rose Garden, 1935. Source: Niagara Falls, Archives of the City Engineer.

arranged in 44 beds. This was considered the high point of the garden.<sup>43</sup> A large indoor Ice Rink (attached to the comfort station) was opened in 1970.<sup>44</sup> Originally it was run by the city.

Due to budget cuts, Hyde Park fell into disrepair in the 1980s. Some renovations did occur, however, such as a thorough renovation of the swimming pool in 1986. The Hyde Memorial Garden was also rehabilitated with new paving. Restoration of the indoor ice rink occurred in 1993 after which time the city considered leasing it to a private company. Hyde Park Lake was also dredged in 1995.<sup>45</sup> In 1999 the original stadium was demolished and replaced with the current stadium.

In analyzing the historical evolution of Hyde Park it is easy to see that while some features have been lost, much remains as it was originally constructed in the 1920s and 30s.

#### Historic Features

- The original stone comfort station, which appears to have a very high degree of architectural integrity and should be evaluated for individual nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Picnic lawn along Pine Avenue
- Tennis courts and handball court
- Maintenance garage
- Bowling greens
- Quoit courts
- Rose garden and arbor
- Stone benches and wall near rose garden
- Memorial tree plaques (two trees missing)
- Small stone comfort station near the wading pool
- Stone building near quoit courts
- Hyde memorial obelisk and sundial
- Hyde Park Lake
- Park Drive and bridge over lake
- Swimming pool (since rebuilt)
- Athletic fields
- Duck Island (including path, pavilion, and bridge)
- Golf course (some holes realigned since original construction to accommodate new club house and parking)

#### Missing or removed historic features

- Wading pool (since replaced with spray park)
- Archery range
- Two memorial tree plaques near the rose garden
- Memorial plaque near Duck Island
- Bridle path
- Six tennis courts (now indoor ice hockey rink)

---

43 Niagara Gazette, "Residents, officials want face lift for Hyde Park," ca. August, 1987.

44 Niagara Gazette, "Ice Rink: Hyde Park Pavilion Must be Rescued," April 17, 1988.

45 Joann Scelsa. Buffalo News, "Hyde Park Lake lauded as restoration success," April 23, 1995.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

### Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 34

#### Added and Altered features:

- Paved area and lighting surrounding the Hyde Memorial
- Indoor ice rink
- Bocce ball courts (north of rose garden)
- Senior Center
- Putting green
- Driving range
- Club House near Porter Road (and surrounding parking)
- Sal Maglie Stadium (rebuilt 2000)
- Parking lots surrounding stadium and pool
- Parking lots north of the stone comfort station
- Veterans memorial (under construction)



Figure 30 (above): 1927 Aerial photo showing extent of Hyde Park development at the time. Note tourist park occupies lower half. Comfort station and golf course are already established.



Figure 31: Undated City Engineer plan of the south section of Hyde Park showing all improvements of the time (likely ca. 1942).

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 36

### **Orleans & 24<sup>th</sup> Street Park**

The Orleans & 24<sup>th</sup> Street Park was set aside as open space to serve the recreational needs of the residents living nearby and were part of the original plan for this neighborhood. The parcels are shown as open space in historic aerial photos dating to 1927. Sometime before 1978 the park was developed with a serpentine path that led to what was likely a gazebo, or other special landscape feature, such as a flower bed, on the south end of the parcel. Only traces of the path remain today.

#### Historic features

None identified

### **15. Orleans & 25<sup>th</sup> Street Park**

The Orleans & 25<sup>th</sup> Street Park was set aside as open space to serve the recreational needs of the residents living nearby and were part of the original plan for this neighborhood. The parcels are shown as open space in historic aerial photos dating to 1927. Sometime before 1978 the park was developed with two paved basketball courts, one on each end of the parcel. The asphalt paving remains, but in very poor condition.

#### Historic features

None identified



Figure 32: 1927 Aerial photo showing existence of Orleans and 24th and Orleans and 25th Street parks.

### Porter Park

As late as 1914 this industrial land lying at the corner of Buffalo and 10<sup>th</sup> Street, adjacent to the International Paper Company's Plant along the Niagara River and near the entrance to the historic Hydraulic Canal, was littered with pulp wood piles ranging from 25' to 95' high. In 1915 the Schoellkopf family (via the Niagara Falls Power Company) donated the land to the city for development of a park.<sup>46</sup> The park was named in honor of the Porter family, who historically owned much of the land along the river from First Street eastward.

Designed by Park Superintendent Fred Aigner, the park was open to the public in 1916. A large naval cannon marked the entrance. Along the river to which it reached was a large stone comfort station situated "of unique architecture surrounded by battlement walls," and whose roof supported a bandstand, an observation tower, and facilities for storing tools. A municipal swimming pool was also located along the river. A large lawn and approximately 200 shade trees, including an allée that framed a connecting path between the cannon and the river, were planted within the park. According to a 1929 news article, the park was "laid out with floral beds" and the walks were "laid in cut stone."<sup>47</sup>

On opening day in August of 1916, the park was reported to host thousands of people who came to swim in the pool and listen to a concert by an Italian band.<sup>48</sup> Swimming in the river was also allowed although it must have been dangerous. Iron grating barriers topped by barbed wired supposedly offered protection to persons from being swept from the relatively calm waters near shore to the rapids downstream.<sup>49</sup>

An old stone chimney survives within Porter Park as a relic of Fort Little Niagara, a French fort dating to 1750 (the first fort on the Upper Niagara River). It was first taken down from its original location approximately 1,200 east of Porter Park by the Niagara Falls Power Company in 1902 and rebuilt near the corner of Buffalo Avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> Street. When that property was later acquired by the Carborundum Corporation, it was removed again piece by piece, and reconstructed within the park in 1942 where it stands today.<sup>50</sup>

Today, very little of the original park remains. The western portion of the park was developed as a parking lot by the city in the 1970s for the purpose of allowing the expansion of Nabisco, Inc.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the park has lost all access and views to the river and the hydraulic canal due to the development of the Robert Moses Parkway. Also lost are the stone comfort station, swimming pool, bandshell, and virtually all other recreational features. All that remains on the property are the iron naval cannon, its elevated stone base, and some of the sycamore trees that framed the axial walk leading from the cannon to the river. While the stone chimney is not in its original location, it is a historically significant feature.

---

46 Niagara Falls Gazette, "Our Park System," April 17, 1929, p. 8:5.

47 Niagara Falls Gazette, "Our Park System," April 17, 1929, p. 8:5; Niagara Falls Gazette, "Our Park System," April 17, 1929, p. 8:5.

48 Niagara Gazette, "Crowds Disported in City Swimming Pool Yesterday," August 28, 1916.

49 Niagara Gazette, "Crowds Disported in City Swimming Pool Yesterday," August 28, 1916.

50 Niagara Falls Gazette, "Would Move Old Chimney to Site in Porter Park," March 24, 1942; Linda Grace, "Park System Vital to City Growth, Health, Niagara Falls Gazette, Oct 8, 1967, pg.1.

51 Niagara Gazette, Editorial "Paving the Parks" November 25, 1972, p. 8, a:1.

# City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 38

## Historic Features

- Sycamore allée
- Iron naval cannon
- Stone base
- Stone chimney (not original location)

## Missing or removed historic features

- Stone comfort station
- Swimming pool
- Bandshell
- Walking paths
- Views of the river and hydraulic canal
- Access to the river
- Observation tower
- Shade trees
- Flower beds

## Added and Altered features:

- Parking lot
- Robert Moses Parkway

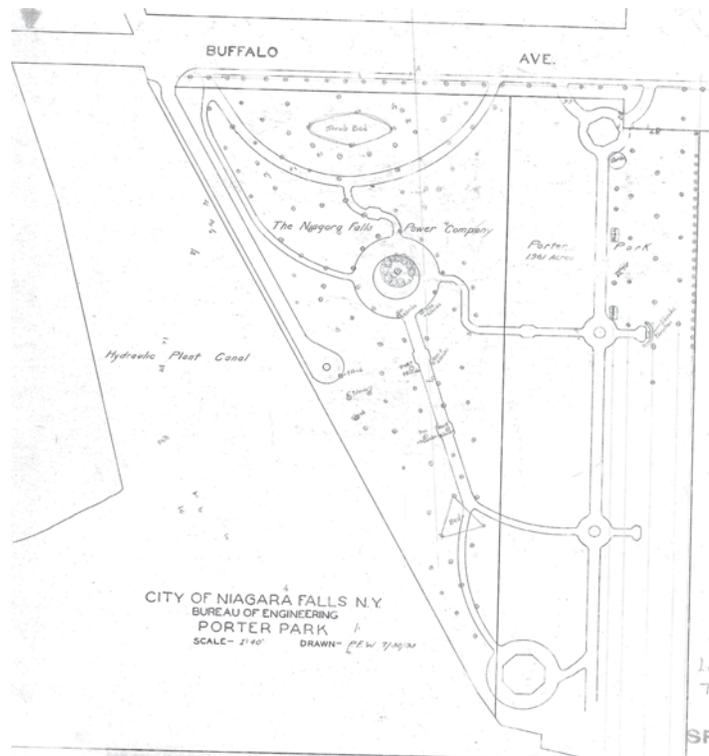


Figure 33 (above): Plan of Porter Park, 1933. Source: Niagara Falls, Archives of the City Engineer. Figure 34 (below): 1927 Aerial photo showing comfort station, pool, and promenade along the canal.





Figure 35: Naval cannon in Porter Park, likely ca. 1915. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 40

### **Mackenna Park**

Little information is known about this park. It appears as undeveloped open space in aerial photo dating to 1927. Maps dating to 1936 show the surrounding lots as developed. The basketball court dates to at least 1978.

#### Historic features

None identified



Figure 35: 1927 Aerial showing conditions surrounding what is now MadKenna Park.

**Gill Creek Park**

Sandborn maps from 1936 indicate that this land was dedicated to public park use at the time, although it was originally labeled as being part of Hyde Park. The stone picnic shelter is shown as being extant at the time. At some point (as evidenced in the 1978 aerial photos), a ballfield was developed in the far southwest corner, and two athletic courts were added—one in the northwest corner and one along Niagara Street. There was also a walking path connected the stone shelter with Porter Road via the concrete bridge over Gill Creek (originally an extension of Welch Avenue). The field and athletic courts are now gone though the path remains.

The park was recently renovated and a new gazebo was added to the northeast corner. The date of origin of the new path and lighting along Gill Creek is not known, though likely within the last decade.

Historic features

- Stone picnic shelter and comfort station
- Gill Creek
- Utility pipe across creek
- Walk connecting shelter with creek

Added and Altered features:

- Gazebo
- Lighting
- Landscaping and benches along creek

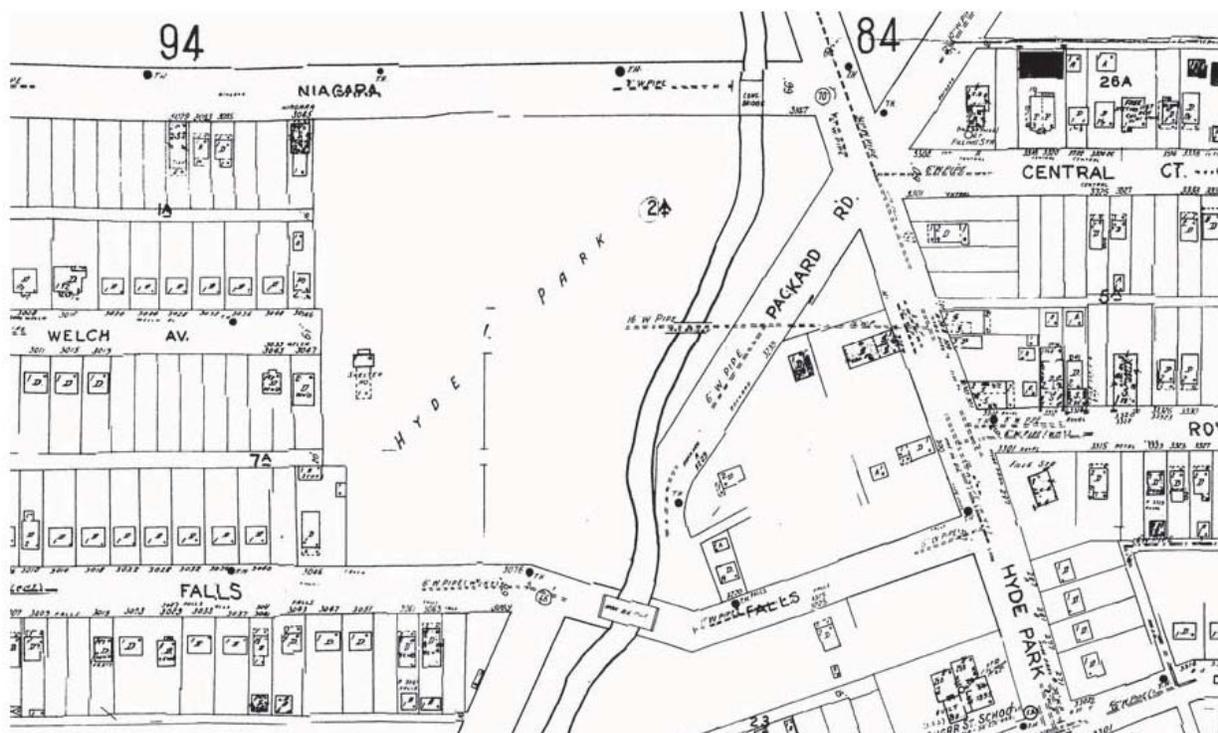


Figure 36: Sandborn Map showing location of Gill Creek Park, 1936. Source: Sandborn Maps of Lewiston and Town of Niagara. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1942. Volume 2. Plate 96.

# City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 42

## Perry Park

Established in 1954, Perry Park was named in honor of J. Robert Perry, one of the founders of the Evershed Neighborhood Association. Originally part of the Evershed School District, the park served the children of the 60<sup>th</sup> Street School.

### Historic features

None identified

## 20. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Park

Very little is known about this park. Sandborn maps from 1936 show this land as open space and dedicated to the Grand Island Bridge Approach. Additional grading of the area likely occurred with the construction of I-90.

### Historic features

None identified



Figure 37: 1978 Aerial showing Perry, 63rd, and 70th Street Parks.

**LaSalle Waterfront Park**

This property was occupied with several homes and the former members-only Century Club in the 1930s. The homes were demolished in the late 1950s with the construction of the Robert Moses Parkway, though the Century Club building remained until the late 1990s. Completed just this past year, the waterfront park serves as a trailhead to the Niagara River Greenway trail that connects the park to the Niagara Reservation.

Historic features

None identified



Figure 38 (left): Sandborn Map showing location of the LaSalle Waterfront Park and historic location of the Century Club, 1928. Source: Sandborn Maps of Lewiston and Town of Niagara. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1942. Volume 2. Plate 108. Figure 39 (right): Master Plan, as designed.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 44

### 70<sup>th</sup> Street (Kies) Park

Developed ca. 1955 near the then new 66<sup>th</sup> Street School and the Bishop Duffy High School, this park now serves the Cataract Elementary School and surrounding neighborhood. The park originally had two ballfields in addition to a basketball court.

#### Historic features

None identified

### 23. Stephenson Park

In 1966 Olsker-McLain Industries donated property on the north side of Stephenson Avenue for a park and recreation for children in the LaSalle area. No other information about this park is available.

#### Historic features

None identified

### 24. Hennepin Park

Seven acres of land were obtained by the city in the early 1940s from Bollier Ave to Laughlin Drive between 82<sup>nd</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> Streets after the surrounding neighborhood started to develop. Although not certain, it is likely that many of the large trees pre-date the surrounding development.

#### Historic features

None identified

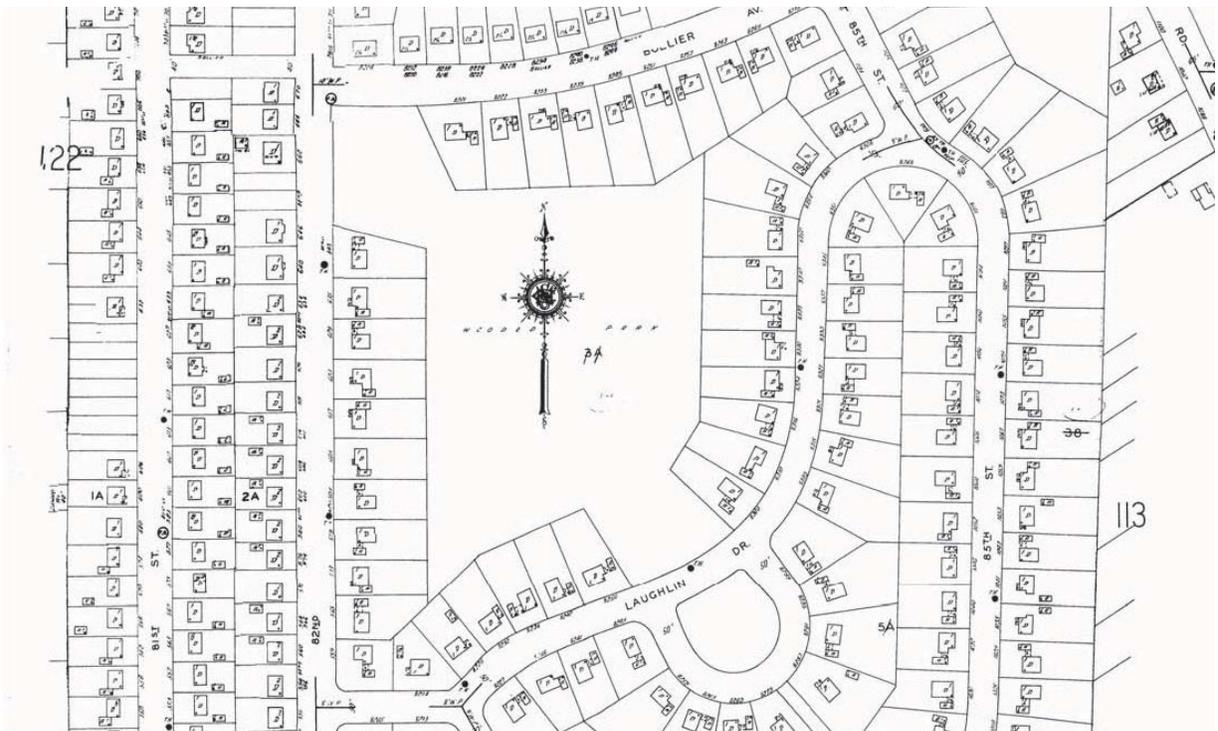


Figure 40: Sandborn Map showing location of the Hennepin Park. Source: Sandborn Maps of Lewiston and Town of Niagara. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1942. Volume 2. Plate 101.

**91st Street Park**

Historically known as LaSalle Park, this park was named after Robert Cavalier de LaSalle. Home to the first County Agricultural Fair, it was established in 1928 by authorization of a City Council tax vote to buy land adjacent to the Frontier Exposition Association and the Hodges and Bouey estates.<sup>52</sup>

This park was originally designed to contain two tennis courts, a basketball court, softball field, and playground along Read Ave., and a small structure on the south end near Military Road. The center of the park was designed to be more passive with a grove of trees and walking paths that radiated outwards from a central feature (possibly a fountain).

Historic Sandborn maps dating to 1928 show a building in the southwest corner near Military Road. It is not clear, however, if all of the features were located according to the 1928 plan. By the 1970s a pool was added to the south end and a large parking lot was constructed in the middle of the park on the west side. Ballfields occupy the remainder of the park.

Historic features

Ballfield in northeast corner of the park

Missing or removed historic features

Ca. 1928 structure

Tennis courts

Basketball courts

Playground

Walkways

Wading Pool and Ice Rink

Added and Altered features:

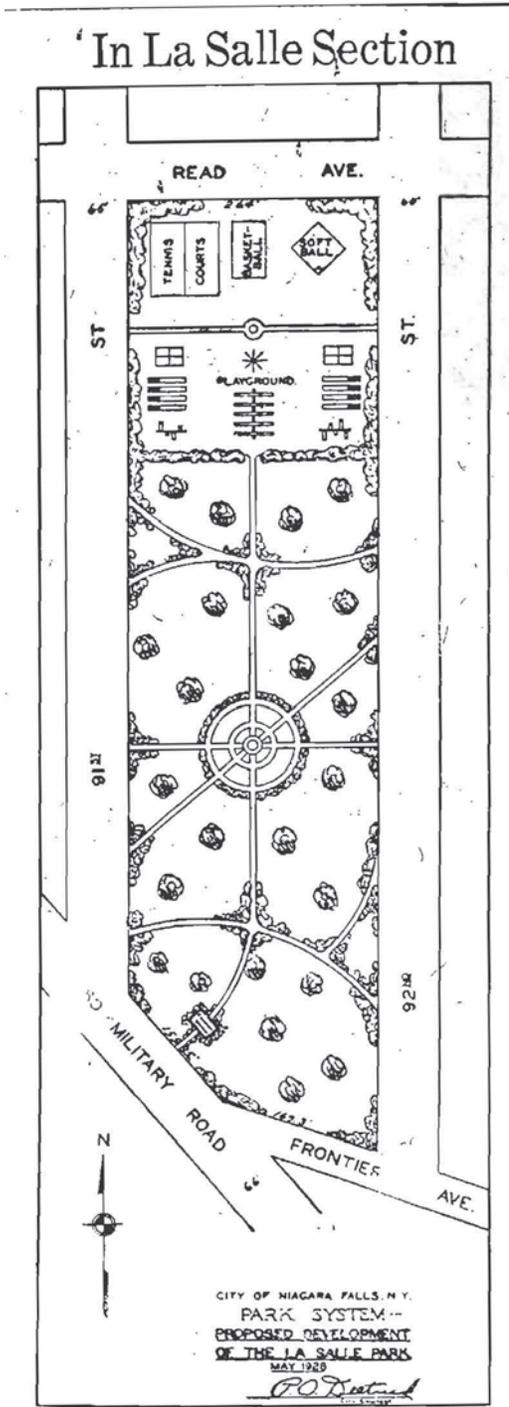
Pool

Poolhouse

Parking lot

Concession stands

Figure 41: Master plan of LaSalle Park. Source: Niagara Falls Gazette, May 5, 1928, p. 9:3. Source: Niagara Falls Public Library, Local History Department.



52 Linda Grace, "Park System Vital to City Growth, Health, Niagara Falls Gazette, Oct 8, 1967, pg.2.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 46

### Jayne Park

Jayne Park was established on Cayuga Island in 1930 when 22 acres of land were donated to the city by a real estate firm LaSalle-Cayuga Inc., with the stipulation that it be made into a park within two years. The park was named in honor of one of the village of LaSalle's former presidents and original residents, Dr. Luther M. Jayne.<sup>53</sup> In 1939 the park was planted with over 1,100 trees and 4,700 shrubs.<sup>54</sup> In the 1940s or 50s it was to add tennis courts, a green meadow, baseball and softball diamonds, boating access, bathing area, parking areas, and a comfort station.<sup>55</sup> If constructed as planned, none of these original features appear to remain except for many of the large trees in the open meadow area.

#### Historic features

Open meadow and large trees

#### Missing or removed historic features

Ballfields

Boating access

Bathing area

Parking areas

Memorial plaque on boulder near flagpole

#### Added and Altered features:

Restrooms/concession stand

Basketball court

Picnic shelter

Playground

#### Features with an unknown date of origin

Shuffleboard court

Flagpole



Figure 42: 1927 Aerial showing the lands that were to become Jayne and Griffon Parks.

53 Linda Grace, "Park System Vital to City Growth, Health, Niagara Falls Gazette, Oct 8, 1967, pg.2.

54 Niagara Gazette, "City, WPA to Spend \$69,000 on Project in Jayne Park Area," September 8, 1939.

55 "LaSalle Group Seeks Construction of Comfort Station, Four Tennis Courts at Park on Cayuga Island," February 4, 1947.

**Griffon Park**

Originally containing 12.8 acres, Griffon Park, which was named for the ship built at the site by LaSalle, was to be left in a natural wooded state as a bird sanctuary. Plans were begun in 1942 with the intent of retaining as much of the natural habitat as possible and planting new shrubs with identifying markers. Beginning in the early 1980s, however, the park was closed for almost two decades while remediation of chemicals, which leaked into the park from the 102nd Street Landfill from the east, was completed by EPA.

Reopened in 2000 with added walking paths, landscaping, furniture, and a playground based upon a plan by Peter J. Smith and funded through the EPA, EPF, the Niagara County Environmental Fund, and the City, the park now encompasses 20 acres.<sup>56</sup> It contains the northernmost public boat launch on the upper Niagara River and only point of access for watercraft within the boundaries of the city of Niagara Falls.

Historic features

None identified

Added and Altered features:

- Walking paths
- Landscaping
- Furniture
- Playground

Features with an unknown date of origin

- Boat launch

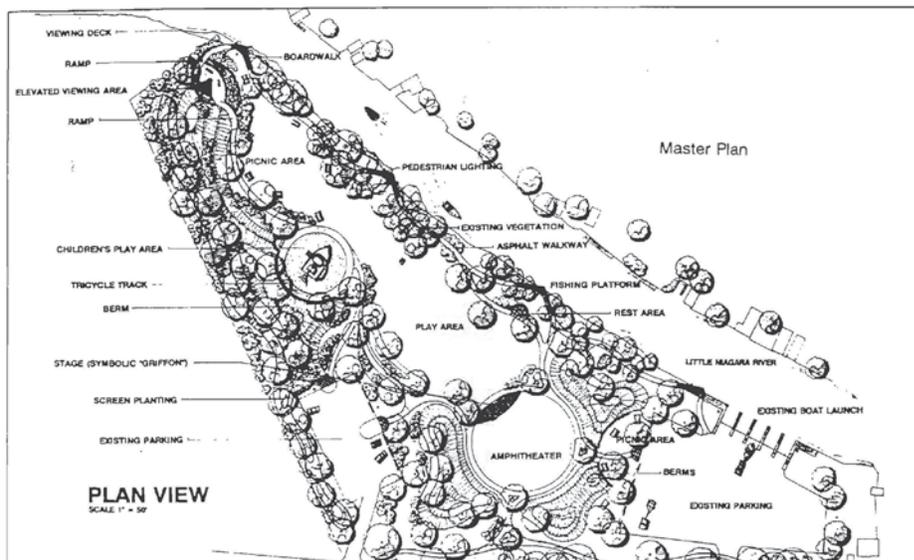


Figure 43: Late 1990s master plan of Griffon Park by Peter J. Smith & Company, Inc.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

### Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 48

#### **Black Creek Park**

Black Creek Park is located near a section of the city that was once known as the neighborhood of Love Canal. While little is known about the history of the park itself, the neighborhood became the subject of national and international attention in the mid 1970s after it became known that approximately 21,000 tons of toxic waste were buried nearby by the Hooker Chemical (now Occidental Petroleum Corporation). The nearby homes and apartment buildings were later demolished in 1982 as the state and federal government declared an emergency and provided funds to permanently relocate the residents.<sup>57</sup>

Environmental cleanup ensued, and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation installed a leachate collection system to capture any rainwater that filtered through the canal. In 1990 the Love Canal Revitalization Agency renamed a portion of Love Canal “Black Creek Village.”<sup>58</sup> Land now comprising Black Creek was designated as “future playground/greenspace.”

#### Historic features

None identified



Figure 44 (left): 2012 aerial of existing conditions; Figure 45 (top right): 1927 aerial showing that the park and surrounding area was in agricultural use; Figure 46 (bottom right): 1978 aerial showing development at the time. A comparison of the 1978 and 2012 aerials shows the extent of the clearance.

57 <http://www.bu.edu/lovecanal/canal/date.html>.

58 <http://www.bu.edu/lovecanal/Fullimages/4%20-%20LC%20color%20map.jpg>

**Caravell Drive Park**

Little information is known about this park. It appears as undeveloped open space in aerial photo dating to 1927. Aerial photos dating to 1978 show the basketball court in its current location.

Historic features

None identified

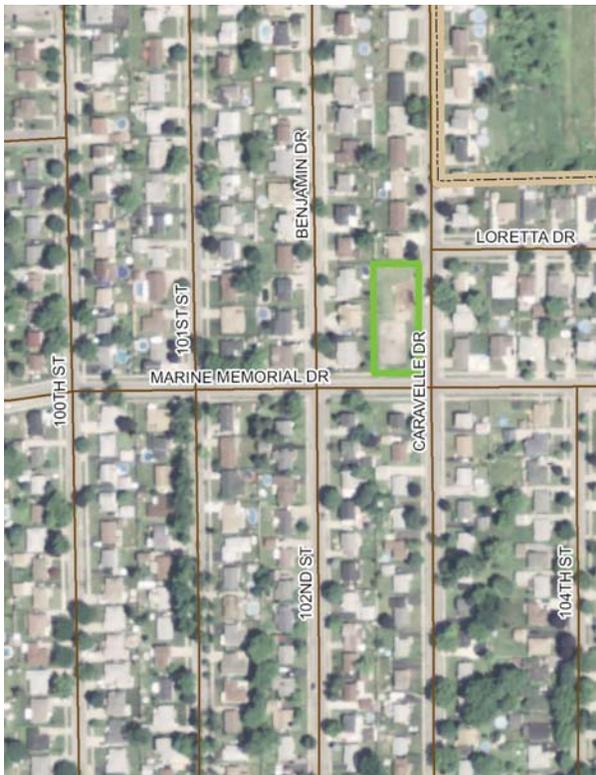


Figure 47 (left): 2012 aerial of existing conditions of Caravell Drive Park; Figure 48 (right): 1927 aerial showing that the park and surrounding area was in agricultural use.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 50

### Wright Park

By 1894 some members of the public had suggested that the city approach the owner of the small triangular parcel bound by Main St., Pine Avenue, and Fifth Street (now Park Place) to have the parcel converted to a public park. According to a Niagara Falls Gazette editorial at the time, “Its location is on the line of the street railway where it would form a pleasant view for visitors in the city and if graced by a fountain would add much to the adjoining property. The city could afford to grade, sod and care for it for the sake of the improvement, but if such an arrangement could not be brought about the owners of the property in the vicinity should take the matter in hand and see if the plot cannot be beautified.”<sup>59</sup>

Apparently the city did not act on this recommendation. Eventually, however, the parcel was purchased by the Schoellkopf family (under the ownership of Schoellkopf Apartment, Inc.) and used as a park. In 1926 the Schoellkopf’s offered to sell it to the city for \$18,000 with the provision that it be dedicated use as a park. By it time it had already become home to a monument erected by the Women’s Relief Corps, Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in 1920 to commemorate Niagara Falls soldiers who suffered and died in the World War (World War I).<sup>60</sup> Apparently the deal did not materialize. The park was later donated by the Schoellkopf family to the Women’s Relief Corps, GAR in the late 1920s.<sup>61</sup> Since that time several other military monuments and memorials, including a canon dedicated to U.S. Marines, have been added to the park to commemorate veterans and others who died as a result of war.

Former names for the park include Cenotaph Park and Veterans Park. Eventually its name was changed to Wright Park in honor of George W. Wright, architect and first Mayor of the City of Niagara Falls.

#### Historic features

Stone obelisk (1920)

#### Added features

Park Place Historic District Sign

#### Features with an unknown date of origin

Memorial cannon

Flagpole

Medal of Honor monument

LTC Matt Urban memorial

Armenian Martyrs memorial

Other memorial stones

59 Niagara Falls Gazette, “A Suggestion,” December 7, 1894, p. 2:1.

60 Niagara Falls Gazette, “Shall the City Retain this Beautiful Park Plot?” August 20, 1926, p. 23:2.

61 Niagara Falls Gazette, “Memorials to Fallen Heroes Beautify Many Falls Parks,” September 1, 1951, p. 18:2.

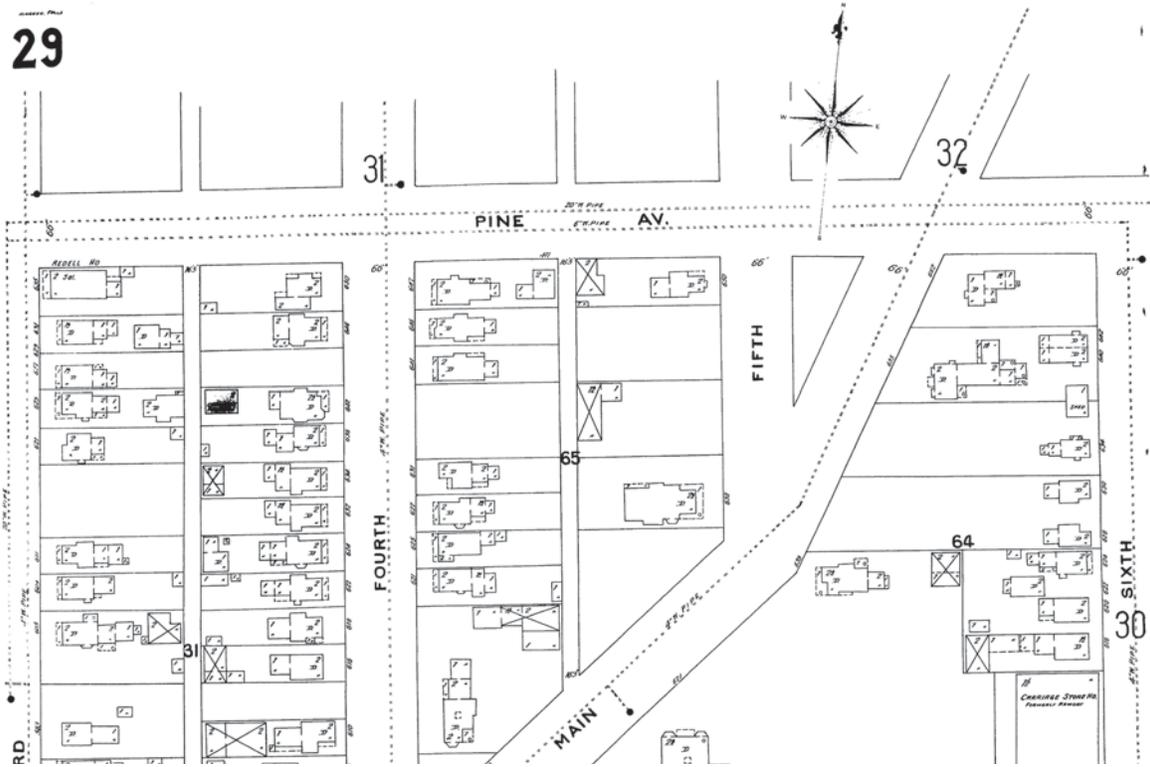


Figure 49: Sandborn Map showing location of Wright Park, 1897. Source: Sandborn Maps of Niagara Falls, New York. New York, Sandborn Map Company, 1897. Plate 29.

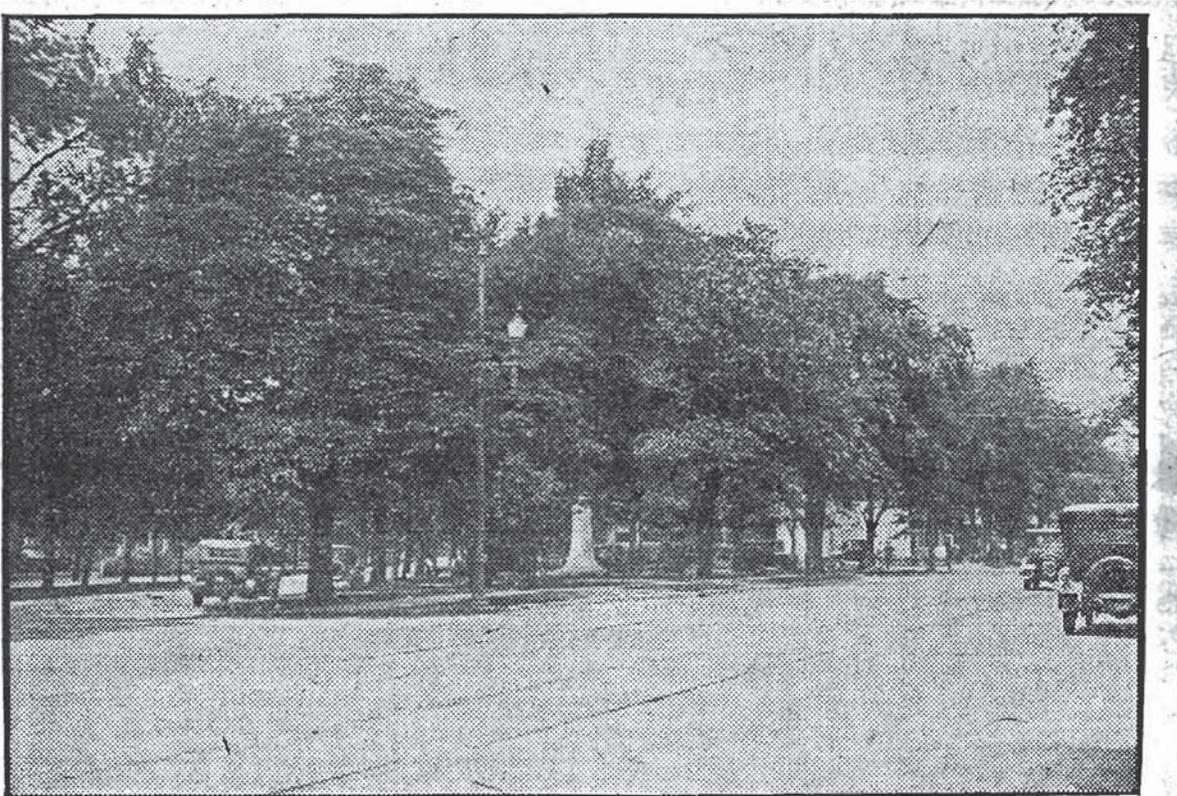


Figure 50: Photo depicting the conditions of Wright Park in 1926. Source: Niagara Falls Gazette, "Shall the City Retain this Beautiful Park Plot?" August 20, 1926, p. 23:2.

## City of Niagara Falls Park Master Plan

Historical Analysis of Park Development

Page 52

### Summary of Historical Significance and Integrity: Park Design & Development within the City of Niagara Falls

Though it began late and took more than 50 years to develop, the City of Niagara Falls did eventually develop a comprehensive park system. While the Olmsted Brothers' recommendations were not fully carried out due to the lack of boulevard and parkway development and other key missed opportunities, some of their recommendations were in fact implemented. These include the development of several neighborhood parks, Hyde Park (the "country" park), as well as the extension of state park lands along the gorge. Both Schoellkopf and Gluck Parks were already established at this time of the study, and both could be considered in-keeping with the Olmsteds' call for ornamental squares. More recently, the establishment of the LaSalle Waterfront Park and the Niagara River Greenway can also be considered to carry out the spirit of their original vision.

In many instances, however, such as the development of the Robert Moses Parkway, the subsequent loss several key parks, such as portions of Schoellkopf Park (now privately owned), and the loss of many historical features within each of the parks, such as the case with Porter, Bellevue, and LaSalle, there is little historical integrity of the park system as a whole as originally recommended by the Olmsteds, and in many cases as originally constructed.

Individually there are two parks that deserve special consideration. Both Gluck Park (1913) and Hyde Park (1925-1940) can be considered historically significant at a local level as they represent two key periods of park development within the City. Both should also be considered to have a high degree of historical integrity.

Professionally designed by Fred Aigner in the Neoclassical style and associated with one of the city's most successful industrialists and well-known benefactors, Paul Schoellkopf, Gluck Park is the oldest city-owned public park and represents the Schoellkopf family's impressive efforts to establish public parklands within the city.

Hyde Park, designed by Harries and Hall--prominent landscape architects at the time--is representative of the movement to establish large municipal parks throughout the country during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While not designed by the Olmsteds themselves, the park is laid out with virtually all the features they recommended be incorporated on the property as being necessary—including the golf course, which was the first in the city. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) contributions to park development in the late 1930s also represent the efforts of the U.S. government's signature relief program.

Additional research is recommended to determine the eligibility of these parks for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places, but special attention should be given to future park improvements to ensure that individual features contributing the parks' historical significance are not compromised.

### **Fred Aigner: Landscape Gardener and Park Superintendent (1914-1919)**

While not well known, Fred Aigner played a key role in the early establishment of the Niagara Falls parks system. Born and educated in Bavaria, Aigner studied botany and gained experience as a landscape gardener in Germany and Egypt, where he assisted in the design and planting of the botanic garden in Frankfort, and the creation of the royal garden at Alexandria.<sup>62</sup>

After immigrating to the United States and relocating to Cleveland, Ohio, he was introduced to John D. Rockefeller, Sr., founder of Standard Oil Company and one of the wealthiest industrialists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mr. Rockefeller hired him as his own private gardener. During his employ, Mr. Aigner was involved with the construction and maintenance of Forest Hill Park during the late 1800s, an estate of over 200 acres designed by landscape architect A.D. Taylor and now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Around 1900 Mr. Aigner left Cleveland for Niagara Falls and eventually came to know Arthur Schoellkopf, who hired him for several projects. His work in Niagara Falls included the beautification of the grounds surrounding Schoellkopf's Hydraulic Power plant (designed by the Olmsted Brothers), the Schoellkopf residence, and eventually the design and maintenance oversight of Schoellkopf Park, Gluck Park, and Porter Park.

In 1915 Mr. Aigner was appointed by the park commission, then chaired by Paul Schoellkopf, as the first municipal Park Superintendent, a position that he held until his untimely death in 1919. Though his career was cut short, Mr. Aigner had significant influence on the city's early park system. Additional research into Mr. Aigner's previous experience and city contributions is recommended.

