

5-1-2007

Negotiating with Nature: The Evolution of Urban Parks in the Twin Cities

Ariel A. Trahan

Macalester College, atrahan@macalester.edu

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Negotiating with Nature:
The Evolution of Urban Parks in the Twin Cities

By: Ariel A. Trahan

Environmental Studies Honors Thesis
Submitted April 27, 2007
Adviser: Christopher Wells
Environmental Studies

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Abstract

This paper examines three local case studies—Loring Park, Lake Harriet, and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary—which illustrate the dynamic relationship between humans and nature. Throughout history urban parks have variously served as pleasure grounds for moral uplift, recreational/entertainment facilities, abandoned sites of urban decay, and most recently sites of ecological restoration that promote a harmonious view of cities and nature. Regardless of their specific form and function, urban parks are not preserved pieces of nature within the city, but rather are contrived landscapes continuously evolving in response to changing social conditions.

Introduction

As we stepped out of the van my classmates and I exchanged looks of confusion and disappointment. Our professor had told us that for our final field trip of the semester we were going to visit a park along the river. As it was a beautiful spring day, my classmates and I looked forward to spending the afternoon in the sun amongst trees, flowers, and idyllic vistas of the river. Therefore we found it hard to contain our disappointment when our professor drove up to an abandoned warehouse and announced that we had arrived at our destination. We all begrudgingly got out of the car and stood in silence, unsure of why our professor had brought us to this abandoned wasteland sandwiched between busy roads and railroad tracks. A member of the class finally broke the silence and asked if this place was actually a park. Our professor informed us that we were standing in St. Paul's newest park: the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. We then launched into a discussion about what makes something a park, and what can be classified as a park. This discussion piqued my interest and inspired me to further investigate the various forms and functions of urban parks. As a history and environmental studies major, I saw an examination of the history of urban parks as an ideal way to combine my two academic passions and attempt to understand what the various manifestations of urban parks reveal about society.

From the creation of the first urban parks in the mid-nineteenth century to the present, urban parks have continuously evolved and served a variety of different functions in society. Urban parks have alternately served as pleasure grounds of moral uplift, recreational and entertainment facilities for the pursuit of happiness and enjoyment, abandoned sites of urban decay, and most recently as sites of ecological

restoration that promote a harmonious relationship between cities and nature. These various manifestations of urban parks are a result of changing societal views about nature and the place of the human in the natural world.

In recent years, urban parks have become an increasingly relevant field of study due to a shift in the identity of the environmental movement, and subsequently a shift in environmental scholarship. The traditional environmental movement that was concerned primarily with preserving large tracts of pristine, untouched wilderness is being replaced by a more modern, dynamic environmental movement that is more all-encompassing and conceives of environmental issues in a broader sense. Specifically, in recent years the environmental movement has become more urban, and more concerned with environmental issues in cities.¹ As our world becomes increasingly urbanized, the relationship between people and the natural world within in an urban setting is an increasingly important field of study.

Analysis of the relationship between people and the natural environment is a central tenet in the field of environmental history. However, even before the formal establishment of environmental history as an academic discipline, scholars attempted to understand the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. Scholars from Thomas Jefferson up to the present day have traditionally emphasized the presence of a man versus nature dialectic.² These studies typically focus on wilderness and set up humans and the natural world in a dichotomous relationship.

¹ Environmentalism has taken on a more urban tone, Penelope Green, "The Year without Toilet Paper," *New York Times* 22 March 2007. See also Christine Rosen and Joel Tarr, "The Importance of an Urban Perspective in Environmental History," *Journal of Urban History* 20 Issue 3 (May 1994): 299-310.

² Peter J. Schmitt. *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969). For more on the city/country dichotomy see Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American*

More recently, scholars have outlined a new framework that critically examines the interconnectedness present in the relationship between people and the environment. William Cronon's works are at the forefront of much of this new, innovative scholarship. In *Nature's Metropolis*, Cronon chronicles the intertwined history of Chicago and the frontier, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of the urban and natural landscape.³ Anne Whiston Spirn's *The Granite Garden* provides a comprehensive, detailed analysis of the presence of nature in the urban environment. By examining the natural features of the urban landscape—such as air, soil, and water--Spirn breaks down the man-nature dialectic and attempts to replace that dialectic with a more holistic view of the world.⁴ Michael Pollan moves outside the realm of urban studies and instead uses the garden as a vehicle through which to understand the dynamic relationship between people and the environment. Pollan suggests that the relationship between man and the environment in the context of the garden may be a better model than the traditional relationship defined as man vs. wilderness.⁵ Cronon, Spirn, Pollan and many others are engaged in a lively academic debate about the relationship between people and the environment. An understanding of the history of urban parks will enhance this debate by critically examining the relationship between humans and the environment in the urban setting.

While there are hundreds of urban parks in the cities of the world, my research focuses specifically on urban parks in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, as

West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978). Also see Morton White, *The Intellectual and the City, From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³ William C. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

⁴ Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

⁵ Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1991), 209-238

those two cities combined have one of the most extensive and diverse park systems in the country.⁶ The three case studies that I examine in this paper—Loring Park, Lake Harriet, and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary—are examples of three different types of parks, all of which are products of social forces. Loring Park has been shaped largely by ideological concerns about what the form and function of an urban park should be. As a central city park, the fate of Loring Park has always been intimately tied to the vitality of the urban core. From its earliest days as a pleasure ground to its more modern manifestation as a place for both recreation and quiet contemplation, Loring Park has always existed as an oasis from the city, thereby furthering the perception of a man versus nature dialectic. Lake Harriet has developed according to a very different model of park development, one guided by commerce rather than ideological concerns. Located outside of the city center, and developed as part of a public-private partnership with the streetcar line, Lake Harriet has flourished as a site of entertainment, cheap amusements, and commerce. Finally, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary reflects the continued relevance of urban parks as well as the contemporary urban park movement's emphasis on ecological health. Regardless of their specific form and function, all urban parks are social creations, shaped and manipulated in accordance with the changing social values surrounding their creation and evolution.

⁶ Alan Tate, *Great City Park* (New York: Spon Press, 2001), 179.

Chapter 1: Loring Park

Sitting on a park bench gazing out at the ducks swimming across the pond in the middle of Loring Park, you would never guess that you were just a short walk from the heart of downtown Minneapolis, a thriving metropolis home to over 380,000 people. Such is the blessing of urban parks: they provide an oasis of nature amidst the artifice of the city. Urban parks have a long history in Minneapolis and in the United States as a whole. Loring Park was formed in the mid-nineteenth century, just as the American urban park movement was beginning to take shape. Created as a manifestation of nineteenth century Victorian ideals about nature and morality, Loring Park was designed as a “pleasure ground”—a place for people to commune with nature through passive recreation and moral uplift. As it evolved from a pleasure ground to a recreational facility to a site of urban decay and finally back into an oasis from the city, Loring Park reflected the social values held by its creators and patrons. Loring Park is not a preserved piece of nature within the city, but rather a contrived landscape that is continuously evolving in response to changing social conditions.

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a time of change and upheaval in much of the United States, when the country was becoming both increasingly industrialized as well as increasingly urbanized.⁷ More people than ever before were working in factories and living in cramped urban quarters. These trends increased people’s alienation from the natural world. Whereas people had previously lived on farms and worked closely with nature, they now had little to no contact with the natural world

⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of the development of the city see Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects* (New York: MJF Books, 1989), 446-481; Charles N. Glab and A. Theodore Brown, *A History of Urban America* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967).

on a daily basis. There was a widespread fear among many intellectual, civic and religious leaders, such as the Reverend Josiah Strong, that the urbanization of society was leading to vice, crime and corruption.⁸ Strong expressed this view with conviction when he claimed that “the city is where the forces of evil are massed.”⁹ The skeptical attitude that people held towards urbanization meant that the social climate was ripe for reform. Out of the uncertainty and apprehension about urbanization came the American urban park movement.

The movement to establish parks within fast-growing American cities was motivated by a variety of factors. The most prominent of these was the belief that nature provided an antidote to the evils of city life. City officials and landscape architects sought to provide an alternative environment within the fast-paced, dirty, and corrupt cities. Andrew Jackson Downing saw urban parks as an opportunity to “soften and humanize the rude, educate and enlighten the ignorant, and give continual enjoyment to the educated.”¹⁰ Many believed that humans needed to interact with nature in order to be fully human. There was a fear in the late nineteenth century that if humans were kept in factories all day and then went to bars and brothels at night, without any interaction with the natural world, they would become increasingly barbaric. Frederick Law Olmsted summed up the beliefs of many leading intellectuals of the day by proclaiming that urban parks should “present an aspect of spaciousness and tranquility, with variety and intricacy

⁸ For more on nineteenth-century urbanization see Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975). For more on America’s moral response to urbanization see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 350-369.

⁹ Robert Weyeneth, “*Reforming Moral Landscapes*,” (Ph.D dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1984), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 45.

of arrangement, thereby affording the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle, and monotonous street-division of the city.”¹¹ Urban parks were an attempt to bring nature to the city, and therefore maintain the vital connection between people and the natural world.

Another important reason that visionaries advocated for the creation of urban parks was their belief in the need for moral urban spaces. This issue goes along with the idea of parks as an antidote to city life, but also pushes the issue further by suggesting that “parks [should be] designed to shape individual character and to guide social relations in order to incorporate city dwellers into what social reformers considered a cohesive community.”¹² The belief that urban parks could truly engender a better society was based on the idea that contact with nature instilled morality. The problems of urban society did not arise because urban dwellers were inherently evil but rather because they were out of touch with nature. If nature could be incorporated into urban society, many reformers believed that urban vice, crime and corruption would be alleviated.¹³ Social reformers such as Charles Loring Brace believed that “nature was designed, balanced, and inherently good” therefore, the presence of urban parks would allow people to come into contact with the natural world on a regular basis and thus be influenced in a positive way.¹⁴ While the belief in urban parks as an agent for moral change carried more weight

¹¹ David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 85. For more on urbanization and the development of urban parks see Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34-40; John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 325-348.

¹² Weyeneth, *Modern Spaces Reforming the Landscape*, 18. See also John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 11-27.

¹³ Terence Young, “Modern Urban Parks,” *Geographical Review* 85 (October 1995): 536.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 536

during various eras of park development, it has been an undercurrent throughout the history of urban parks.

Even though the argument for urban parks as an antidote to city living was the driving force behind the emergence of the urban park movement in the late nineteenth century there were other important factors as well. One issue that many landscape architects stressed was the sanitary importance of parks. Many cities on the East Coast of the United States and in Europe had been suffering cholera outbreaks, as well as the proliferation of other diseases. The presence of urban parks within city limits provided urbanites a respite from all the germs that existed within the close quarters of cities. Leading public officials, such as John H. Rauch, referred to urban parks as “the lungs of a city.”¹⁵ The open space of urban parks literally provided urban dwellers with a place to catch a breath of fresh air. In claiming that “the necessity of public squares, tastefully ornamented and planted with trees, cannot be too strongly urged upon public attention, as one of the most powerful correctives to the vitiated air within the reach of the inhabitants of a populous place,” the American Medical Association’s Committee on Public Hygiene was simply one of many organizations that advocated for the creation of urban parks for health reasons.¹⁶ The desire for a healthy society, both morally and physically, was the leading reason for the creation of central-city parks in the end of the nineteenth century.

The demand for parks in urban areas led to an explosion in the field of landscape architecture in the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Perhaps the most famous nineteenth century

¹⁵ Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape*, 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 61.

¹⁷ G. B. Tobey, *A History of Landscape Architecture: The Relationship of People to the Environment* (New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), 141-180. For more on the fundamentals of landscape architecture see John Ormsbee Simonds, *Landscape Architecture: The Shaping of Man’s*

landscape architect, a man who embodied the hopes and dreams of the urban park movement, was Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted is often considered the father of the urban park movement in the United States due to his extensive work in park design.¹⁸ Although Olmsted did not have any direct role in the development of Loring Park, his influence on his contemporary landscape architects is too important to go unmentioned. In fact, most nineteenth century landscape architects were influenced by Olmsted, either by working directly with him or by studying his ideas.¹⁹ Olmsted's philosophy of park design infused the nineteenth century park movement.

Olmsted, like his contemporaries in landscape architecture, was not against urbanization. He understood that the future lay in urbanization; his life's work was an attempt to understand how to mitigate its effects through a connection with nature, in the form of urban parks. Olmsted was a firm believer that the park should be a pleasure ground, a place for people to go to forget the city. Olmsted asserted his theories and beliefs through his structural designs. "In contrast with the geometric regularity of the urban grid, the park landscape was curvilinear, with few structures."²⁰ Olmsted sought to provide a pastoral oasis where people could escape the ills of city life. Olmsted attempted to design his parks so that park patrons would see no semblance of the city around them while they were in the park. For Olmsted, the burning "question was how to make cities

Natural Environment (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961); H. Stuart Orloff and Henry B. Raymore, *The Book of Landscape Design* (New York: M. Barrows & Company, Inc., 1959), 22-61.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Jellicoe and Susan Jellicoe, *The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1995), 279. For more on Frederick Law Olmsted see Laura Wood Roper, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). For more on Olmsted's contributions to landscape design see Albert Fein, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1972), 20-30.

¹⁹William H. Tishler, *Midwestern Landscape Architecture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 42.

²⁰ Young, "Modern Urban Landscapes," 536.

livable and how to influence men's minds and characters so that civilization would prosper."²¹ He saw the presence of nature as a necessary component of urban growth.

One of Olmsted's contemporaries, and the landscape architect who had the most influence on the Minneapolis Park System and Loring Park, was Horace Cleveland. Cleveland is often overshadowed by Olmsted in the history books, but has recently begun to be appreciated for his immense contributions to landscape architecture. Cleveland, originally from Massachusetts, worked for one season in Olmsted's firm. The two men had a deep mutual respect for each other and formed a lasting friendship.²² However, Cleveland grew restless on the East Coast and in 1869 moved to Chicago to start a landscape architecture firm there. He came to the Twin Cities in the 1870s and shared his views on the importance of parks with the Minneapolis City Council. Cleveland attempted to convince the city that park development was an essential undertaking for a growing city. People were initially skeptical about park building because they thought it would lead to heavy taxation in order to fund the construction and maintenance of the park, but "the practical value of broad and liberal schemes of improvement which render a city attractive to strangers, while they strengthen the local pride and affection of the inhabitants," outweighed the financial burden in the long run, according to Horace Cleveland.²³ Cleveland also pointed out the importance of obtaining the park land immediately so that in the future the land would be available for the city to do with it as they pleased. "If you have faith in the future greatness of your city, do not shrink from

²¹ Witold Rybczynski, "Why We Need Olmsted Again," *Wilson Quarterly* 23 (June 1999): 16.

²² William H. Tishler, *American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places* (Washington D.C.: Preservation Press, 1989), 24.

²³ Horace Cleveland, *Suggestions for a System of Park and Parkways* (Minneapolis: Johnson, Smith, & Harrison, 1883), 3.

securing while you may such areas as will be adequate to the wants of such a city.”²⁴ The City Council responded well to Cleveland’s suggestions and hired him to design what would later become Loring Park.

In addition to hiring Cleveland as the city’s landscape architect, the City Council also acted on Cleveland’s managerial advice. Cleveland, a firm believer that Minneapolis was especially suited to a system of parks due to its immense natural beauty, urged the city council to form a special commission to oversee land acquisition, park development, and ultimately park maintenance. Motivated by Cleveland’s advice, as well as broader societal trends, the city council created the Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners on February 27, 1883.

The creation of an independent Park Board was a revolutionary idea as most cities’ parks were administered by subcommittees of the city council or the state legislature, rather than an independent board. To this day, the park board is the only one of its kind in the United States. Beyond its independence from the city council, the Minneapolis Park Board is also unique in that its members are elected rather than appointed. Additionally, the Park Board has a significant amount of financial autonomy as two thirds of its budget comes from an automatic payment from property taxes.²⁵

The formation of the Minneapolis Park Board was an essential step in the history of park development as it helped to realize the abstractions and theories of the urban park movement. In addition to the formation of a Park Board, there was a realization that the board would need to hire a Superintendent to assist in the acquisition of land and eventual

²⁴ Ibid, 5.

²⁵ Alexander Garvin et al., *Urban Parks and Open Space* (Washington D.C.: The Urban Land Institute, 1997), 62.

development of the actual parks. William Berry was hired as the first superintendent and was thus entrusted with the task of assisting the board in bringing the urban park movement to Minneapolis.

The new Park Board first met on March 14, 1883, to establish its agenda and elect a leader. Charles Loring became President of the Board by way of a unanimous vote. At the board's third meeting on April 20, 1883, George A. Brackett and Eugene M. Wilson, in addition to Loring, formed a committee to survey and investigate the land that would later become Loring Park. The plot of land they sought to acquire was located just west of downtown Minneapolis.

Before the arrival of European settlers, the land was inhabited by Native Americans. Ojibwe and Sioux Indians had had a strong presence in the Twin Cities area for centuries. They had used the land as a hunting and fishing ground. Additionally, an Indian trail linked the land that became Loring Park to another Indian settlement at Lake Calhoun.²⁶ In 1803, the United States government acquired the land as part of the Louisiana Purchase and many of the Indians moved to new lands. However, some of the Indians, namely Keg-o-ma-go-shieg, who maintained a home where the park shelter now stands, returned to the land annually in order to hunt and fish. This ritual continued even after the first white settlers inhabited the land.

The first white settlers to occupy what is now Loring Park were two families from Maine. Joseph Johnson and Allen Harmon settled on the north and south sides of the future park land, respectively. It was from Johnson that the committee, headed by Loring, acquired the land for the proposed park. On May 5, 1883, the park opened to the public as

²⁶ Leonard Inskip, "Loring Celebration Honors 100 Years in an Urban Park's Life," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 10 July 1983.

Central Park, and in subsequent years went through several different names. On April 25, 1885, the Park Board voted to change the name of the park to Spring Grove Park, but the name was not well received and on May 16, 1885 the name reverted back to Central Park. On December 20, 1890 as Loring's term as President of the Board was about to expire, the board unanimously voted to rename the park after him in appreciation for his many years of dedication to the park and the park board. Thus Loring Park finally acquired its permanent name.

When the park first opened, it embodied the "pleasure ground" idea that landscape architects had been advocating in all major cities. Horace Cleveland designed the park based on the ideals of the park as an antidote to city life. As a result, he attempted to create a space in which a person would forget the fact that they were in a city.²⁷ The park consisted of many broad, meandering walkways, elaborate flower gardens, highly decorative trees, and large open meadows. Views from the park were controlled by various types of vegetation so that a park patron could never see the city that surrounded them.²⁸ Landscape architects and civic leaders collaborated to form urban parks in order to construct a more well-rounded urban landscape.

While there were many motives behind the development and implementation of parks by the far-sighted landscape architects of the day, the main purpose of the park at this time was to establish a space apart from the city. The earliest stage of the park movement successfully provided city dwellers an antidote to their fast-paced life. While the design

²⁷ Linda Mack, "Restoring Loring Park: A Vision for Fighting the Wear and Tear Could Revitalize this Key Urban Oasis," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 9 April 1995, p. 1, 5B.

²⁸ Burt Berlowe et al., *Reflections in Loring Pond* (Minneapolis: Citizens for a Loring Park Community, 1986), 21.

of the park was important and well-thought out, “aesthetics was a means to an end.”²⁹ The ultimate purpose of the urban park in the late nineteenth century was to provide people with a place to escape the city.

A strong desire on the part of Cleveland and Olmsted, as well as other landscape architects, to provide a space for all people to commune with nature, particularly the less fortunate who did not have summer retreats, was a strong undercurrent beneath the creation of urban parks.³⁰ Olmsted was a firm believer in the power of urban parks to embody democratic principles. He felt that through a shared physical space, Americans of diverse backgrounds could come together on equal ground.³¹ Echoing the views of his contemporary, Cleveland: “An 1895 view of the pleasure garden landscape. . . . We live in cities, large public parks could provide for those whose means do not permit them to receive the benefits of the country and aspect of rural beauty within the urban environment.”³² Urban parks were to be a place for people of all classes and socio-economic backgrounds. In this way, urban parks attempted not only to enhance individual moral and physical health, but also attempted to embody the democratic ideals of the United States.

Neither Cleveland nor Olmsted ever intended for urban parks to be preserved pieces of untouched nature within city limits; rather, they conceived them as carefully constructed landscapes that were meant to look like picturesque natural areas. They saw landscape architecture as an art form. The landscape architects who designed the pleasure grounds of the late nineteenth century carefully planned the layout and structure of the

²⁹ Daniel Botkin, *No Man's Garden: Thoreau and a New Vision for Civilization and Nature* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2001), 227

³⁰ Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape*, 67.

³¹ Tishler, *American Landscape Architecture*, 41.

³² Cleveland, *Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkways*, 67.

parks in order to create the feeling that one was in a natural area. For example, in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, Olmsted artfully used the contours of the land to ensure that a person could not see the buildings that surrounded the park. Indeed some landscape architects, including Olmsted, felt upset and insulted when patrons mistakenly thought that the parks were preserved natural areas rather than constructed pieces of art. Olmsted was not only disappointed on a personal level that people did not recognize the amount of work he had put into designing urban landscapes, but he also found the lack of differentiation between natural and constructed landscapes problematic on a higher level because then people would fail to see the possibility to create of similar spaces elsewhere.³³

Loring Park's lake provides an obvious example of the park's constructed nature. In its natural state, the lake was merely an undesirable swampy area. But the park designers wanted a picturesque and pleasurable lake, so in the winters of 1883 and 1884, they sawed and carved the frozen swamp from the ground and used it as fill for the construction of the rest of the park.³⁴ Many people today mistakenly believe that the lake, and the whole park, are preserved pieces of unmodified natural areas, when in fact the entire park is the result of the same human forces that constructed the city. In this context, it makes little sense to distinguish between natural and artificial landscapes because as Anne Whiston Spirn has put it, "all landscapes are constructed. They are phenomena of nature and products of culture."³⁵ A specific landscape is never completely natural or completely artificial; instead all landscapes are a combination of the two. Early park

³³ Anne Whiston Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 111.

³⁴ "A Plan to Clean Loring Pond," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 29 June 1974.

³⁵ Spirn, "Constructing Nature," 110.

designers recognized this more clearly than we do today, and promoted urban parks as both natural spaces and as created art forms.

During its first twenty years in existence, the Park Board made great strides towards realizing the goal of creating nature in the city by establishing urban parks. Upon Horace Cleveland's suggestion to "[secure] the areas that are needed before they become so occupied, or acquire such value as to place them beyond reach," the Park Board had devoted its early years to acquiring land.³⁶ This period of gradual land acquisition under the supervision of the Park Board and Superintendent William Berry laid the foundation for Loring Park and the entire metropolitan park system. With Berry's retirement in 1905, the era of land acquisition gave way to the era of development. Berry's successor, Theodore Wirth, would see to it that the land that Berry and the Park Board so diligently acquired was developed to its full potential.

In 1905, Charles Loring handpicked Theodore Wirth to be the next Superintendent of Parks. Wirth, who was Swiss by birth, had made his name in the park movement on the East Coast where he served as the superintendent of parks in Hartford, Connecticut. Wirth was initially hesitant to leave the East Coast, but upon visiting Minneapolis and seeing the great potential the park system held, he decided to accept the position in late 1905, and subsequently moved with his wife and three sons to Minneapolis.³⁷

The arrival of Wirth on the Park Board symbolized the end of the era of the park as a pleasure ground, marking a clear shift in the way that people conceived of urban

³⁶ Cleveland, *Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkways*, 5.

³⁷ Theodore J. Wirth, *Biographical Information on Theodore Wirth and the Wirth Family* (Billings, Montana: Wirth Design Associates, 1999).

parks. Gone were the days when parks were an idealistic slice of carefully designed, picturesque nature in the city, replaced by a worldview that valued parks as places of recreation and entertainment. In the park's early days, park boosters frowned upon those who saw parks as places for recreation or revelry. As one resident explained, "in those days there was no hockey rink on the smaller of the lakes. In fact the snow wasn't even cleared off the spot, and as a general rule, there was a small fence erected near the bridge to keep skaters from venturing to the small lake."³⁸ In fact, he pointed out, "there was a park board ruling against anyone using 'speed skates' on park rinks except in the morning and between five and seven o'clock in the evening."³⁹ In contrast, the beginning of the twentieth century saw the explosion of active recreation in the park in the form of sporting contests, ice-skating, and other activities that promoted the use of the park for recreational activities.⁴⁰ The advent of active recreation within the park served as a concrete example of the shift in social values, and consequently in park philosophy.

This shift, like all other shifts in park policy and implementation, was the result of the interplay between a variety of factors. The new superintendent, Theodore Wirth, had a lot to do with the new direction that the Park Board embarked upon in the early twentieth century. As a park administrator Wirth was a firm believer that parks should be used, not admired. Wirth's inspiration for his conception of parks came early on in his life when he was a young man living in New York. The story goes that as he was walking through Central Park on his way home from a long day of work, he cut across the grass as

³⁸ Billy B., "Tittle-Tattle Tattle-Tale," *Shopping News*, January 1939.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ For more on the emergence of active recreation see Charles E. Doell and Louis F. Twardzik, *Elements of Park and Recreation Administration* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1973), 53. Also see Foster Rhea Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965).

he was tired and wanted to get home as quickly as possible. The policeman stopped him and reprimanded him for walking on the grass. A policeman informed Wirth that he should walk on the sidewalk in order to respect the beauty of the park. Wirth did as he was told and continued his walk home on the marked pathways. But, he made a promise to himself that “if [he] ever [had] anything to say about parks, there [wouldn’t] be any laws like that. What good are parks if the people can’t use them? As ornaments they’re a waste of money.”⁴¹ That episode so deeply affected Wirth that the first thing he did upon becoming superintendent of the Minneapolis Parks System was to remove and burn the “Keep off the Grass” signs. He also ordered that the fences guarding the lawns be torn down so that more people could enjoy the parks. This illustrated a shift in people’s perceptions of the purpose of the park. Wirth summed up the new sentiment by declaring that, “the parks are for the people, we want to make them part of their lives.”⁴²

The shift from the urban park as a pleasure ground towards the urban park as a recreational facility marked the arrival of the Progressive Era and the extension of progressive beliefs into all aspects of society. Park boosters now thought of parks as a place for people to go with their families to reform through lives through active participation in recreational activities. Wirth was a strong advocate of outdoor recreation and wanted to make sure that parks were accessible to all people. On this note he echoed the beliefs of his predecessors, men such as Olmsted and Cleveland, who also believed that parks should be a place for all people to experience the natural world. As a result of Wirth’s commitment to recreation, the landscape of the park changed significantly during his tenure as park superintendent, reflecting the continuous redefinition of the

⁴¹ “Wirth Creates Parks for All by Revolution,” *Minneapolis Journal*, 29 April 1928.

⁴² *Ibid.*

relationship between humans and the natural world in response to changing social conditions.

Wirth supported his beliefs with physical improvements to Loring Park. The first big change was the construction of a park shelter. In a letter to Charles Loring in August of 1906, Wirth asserted his belief that “[a] park building much more than any other public building must be considered a part of its surroundings respectively, the park or the section of the park in which it stands must receive first consideration.”⁴³ Wirth had a deep sense of the power and importance of the park as a place where people connected with nature. Wirth’s sensitivity and recognition of the park as a unique space accounted for the successful transition of the park from a pleasure ground where people interacted with nature through observation to a recreational facility where people interacted with the environment through engagement.

Wirth himself believed that the shift in the perceptions and uses of parks was more of a natural progression than a true shift. Wirth saw the increasingly strong emphasis on recreation as an outgrowth of the early ideas about the function of the urban park in society. In his mind, the pleasure ground had been so successful in maintaining a connection between people and the environment that park patrons now demanded more out of their interaction with the natural world. Passive recreation no longer satisfied park patrons seeking to connect with the natural environment; their desire for active recreation and further engagement with the environment necessitated a change in park policy.⁴⁴ As a result, Theodore Wirth ushered in an era of park development and recreation which

⁴³ Theodore Wirth to Charles Loring, 3 August 1906, Minneapolis Central Library Special Collections.

⁴⁴ Theodore Wirth, *Minneapolis Park System, 1883-1944 : Retrospective Glimpses into the History of the Board of Park Commissioners of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the City's Park, Parkway, and Playground System* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 1945), 318.

maintained the park's original qualities while also adapting and reflecting the changing values of society.

The construction of the park shelter was only the first of many structural changes implemented at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the construction of the park shelter came the installation of basketball courts, concrete tennis courts, playground equipment, and the designation of a horseshoe pitching area. Additionally, the Park Board hired a staff person to supervise and coordinate all the new recreational facilities in the park. While the new changes in the park benefited all age groups, it was children who benefited most from the restructuring of the park in the early part of the twentieth century. In fact, according to a newspaper article in June 1916, mothers “often leave their smallest children there, while they go shopping or go to make afternoon calls. It is not infrequent that the custodian receives requests from parents asking him to take care of their children while they go downtown.”⁴⁵ Supporters of the playground movement claimed that “using parks to foster responsible children and adults would lead to reduced costs for the police and justice systems ... failure to spend a few dollars during a child's youth would lead to a greater public expenditure later in the form of policemen, courts, and incarceration.”⁴⁶ Thus the physical expansion of urban parks to include recreational opportunities provided various services to society.

In addition to the construction of new recreational amenities within the park, the new era of park development also ushered in new forms of entertainment. For example, in 1926 there was a summer program where there was a series of community programs held in the park each Friday night in the bandstand as a way to foster community. The era

⁴⁵ “Loring Playgrounds Popular Place Now,” *Minneapolis Journal*, 4 June 1916.

⁴⁶ Young, “Modern Urban Landscapes,” 538.

of the park as a recreation facility marked a new conception of the urban park in people's minds. The urban park was no longer simply an oasis of nature within the city, but now was also seen as a place for entertainment, recreation, and interaction with others. The ability of the park to evolve and provide for people's different demands on it has been its key to success over the years.

The end of Theodore Wirth's tenure as park superintendent marked the end of Loring Park's brief stretch as a recreational facility. Wirth helped the park transition from its early years as a pleasure ground into a lively, engaging recreational facility. At a retirement dinner celebrating his many achievements, Wirth humbly stated that he was happy with his life's work "because the parks are not only beautiful but useful."⁴⁷ Theodore Wirth's career embodies the shift that occurred in the park movement away from aesthetics to utility. Parks became increasingly malleable: they could be altered to accommodate human needs. This marked a reconception of the natural world within city limits, no longer did nature need to be preserved and admired from afar; instead it could be adapted to suit the needs of humans.

The next major shift in park policy came amidst the enormous wave of change that occurred throughout the United States following the end of World War II. This era of unprecedented prosperity led to an increased standard of living for most Americans. An increased standard of living meant that people could focus on what they considered luxuries, rather than simply focusing on issues of survival. In the period after the war, this meant that people devoted more time to recreation. As a result, park use increased, at least in the short term. In fact, "the increased standard of living enabled Americans to

⁴⁷ "Wirth Honored for Park Work," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 27 September 1935.

triple personal expenditures for recreation.”⁴⁸ However, this seeming blessing for urban parks was ultimately short-lived as a variety of other factors led to a decline in central city parks like Loring Park.

Contrary to the initial boost in park usage after World War II, the increased standard of living, combined with increased suburbanization, set the stage for Loring Park’s decline. The increasing affluence that spread across America in the post-war era led people seeking to fulfill the American dream to flee from the city to the suburbs. In the years between 1950 and 1960 Minneapolis lost 38,856 people, keeping pace with the national average for most large cities.⁴⁹ The loss of so many people to the suburbs led to urban decline and a decline in the vitality of the urban core. As a result, urban parks suffered greatly during the post-war years. The downtown area of most large cities came to be seen as a danger zone, and urban parks were seen as a safety threat. High crime rates within central-city parks generated fear and discouraged use. However, as Darson Phillips found in his 1980 quantitative study of crime in Loring Park, “the fear of crime in the Loring Park neighborhood [was] greater than the actual occurrence.”⁵⁰

Although the dangers of urban parks are often exaggerated, it is true that central-city parks have been plagued with more than their fair share of trouble over the years. In 1964, the *Minneapolis Star* reported that “Loring Park [was] included among the ‘problem’ parks in the city by Park Police Capt. James T. Curran. Loring, Minnehaha, and the lake parks take the most manpower and frequently cause the most trouble in

⁴⁸ C. Ben. Wright, *Minneapolis Parks and Recreation: A History of the Park and Recreation Board since World War II* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, 1982), 76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 75.

⁵⁰ Darson Phillips, *Loring Park Study* (Minneapolis: Loring Nicollet Bethlehem Community Centers, Inc. and Wells Board of the Cathedral of St. Mark, 1980), 25.

enforcement, he has said.”⁵¹ The decline in urban parks in the post-war period reflected people’s increasing disillusionment with the urban lifestyle and their desire to embrace a suburban life.

Suburbanization and the growth of a car culture went hand in hand. The decentralized design of suburbia increased people’s dependence on automobiles. The growth of a car culture was also a result of the increased standard of living that came about after the end of World War II. Owning a car became a status symbol, a rite of passage into the middle-class lifestyle. The government, realizing that the scope of the automobile would only continue to grow, passed the Interstate Highway Act in 1956. This allowed for the expenditure of \$27 billion on 41,000 miles of highways.⁵² Congress and the federal government were trying to keep up with the demands of the new car culture. The increased mobility of urban dwellers led to a decline in the usage of central city parks as people increasingly looked outside of the urban core for recreational opportunities.

Not only did urban parks suffer directly as a result of suburbanization and the loss of park patrons, but the construction of new highways threatened the physical boundaries of many parks. Highway planners developed highways on park lands because the land was already cleared, and homeowners and businesses did not need to be displaced. Therefore there was less opposition to the condemnation of park land.⁵³ While the construction of Interstate 94 did negatively affect Loring Park, the blow was cushioned by the fact that the Park Board adopted a land replacement policy which stated that any

⁵¹ “Loring Council to Ask Park Board for Lights,” *Minneapolis Star*, 12 Feb. 1964.

⁵² Wright, *Minneapolis Parks and Recreation*, 88.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 89.

funds obtained through the sale of park lands would be allocated to the purchase of replacement lands.⁵⁴ The policy, which is often referred to as the “No Net Loss of Park Land” simply lessened the impact of a larger cultural phenomenon. Society now placed more value on the independence and autonomy symbolized by the construction of the freeway than on the moral, aesthetic, and health benefits derived from “natural” spaces.

The urban decline of the 1950s and early 1960s left Loring Park battered, its image suffering greatly from the reports of violence and crime within the park and the surrounding areas. The park had come a long way from the days when it represented the antithesis of the evils of the city; now the ills of the city seemed to have made their way into the park. As a central city park, Loring Park was especially hard hit by the urban decay of the mid-twentieth century. Mirroring the abandonment of the central city itself, the park became a symbol of the crime and corruption that increasingly plagued the city’s core.

The Park Board tried hard to fight the negative image that the park had obtained in the rough years of the mid-twentieth century. In 1968, recreation once again made a comeback as the Park Board tried to lure people back into the city after urban decline. The Park Board introduced a pedal boat rental program so that park patrons could relax and reflect while enjoying Loring Park Lagoon.⁵⁵ This was one way that the Park Board attempted to lure people back into the park, by re-imagining the use of open space. Whereas most recently the park had been used for active recreation such as baseball and

⁵⁴ Wright, *Minneapolis Parks and Recreation*, 91. For more on governmental seizing of parkland see William H. Whyte, *The Last Landscape* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 125-131.

⁵⁵ Steve Trimble, *In the Shadow of the City: A History of the Loring Park Neighborhood* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Community College Foundation, 1974).

basketball, the introduction of the paddle boats was an attempt to return to the pleasure ground days when people went to the park to reconnect with nature.

The 1970s brought more changes to the park, many of which reflected changes to the Loring Park neighborhood, which surrounds the park itself. The Loring Park Development District, a collaborative effort between the city of Minneapolis and several private developers, was an attempt to revitalize the downtrodden urban center by luring residents back into the neighborhood through the development of new housing and commercial properties.⁵⁶ The project was extremely controversial as many long-time residents felt that their needs and rights were being trampled in order to make way for new commercial properties that would prove to be lucrative for the city. While the impact of the private developers certainly indirectly affected the park by altering the surrounding neighborhood, the aspect of the project orchestrated by the public sector had a much more direct impact on the park itself.

One of the signature components of the public sector aspect of the Loring Park Development District project was the construction of a pedestrian and bikeway route linking Loring Park to nearby Nicollet Mall. This new addition to the park was coined the “Loring Greenway.” The construction of the greenway signified an important resurgence in public recognition of the importance of open space. The construction of the greenway was a collaborative project between the local and federal government. The city of Minneapolis received a \$1.7 million federal grant for landscaping and surfacing the greenway.⁵⁷ In addition to the construction of the greenway, Loring Park itself received a face-lift with new play equipment, walkways, and lighting. The city’s eagerness to put

⁵⁶ “Loring Park: New Life for the Old Neighborhood,” *New Homes*, June-July 1977.

⁵⁷ “City gets U.S. funds for Loring greenway,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 9 Sept 1977.

money into revamping the park shows that people once again recognized the value of open space. Cultural values were shifting back to an emphasis on and appreciation of the urban area.

In conjunction with the city's willingness to invest in the park, there was also a move by the Park Board to encourage private investment in the park. Recognizing that the urban decline of the mid-twentieth century had adversely affected urban parks, the Minneapolis Park Board formed the Minneapolis Park Foundation, as a way to raise private funds for city parks.⁵⁸ The foundation called for corporations and foundations to finance public parks through the Adopt-a-Park program. The Dayton-Hudson Foundation, strongly vested in the vitality of downtown Minneapolis, "adopted" Loring Park under this program. Between 1977 and 1981 the foundation contributed over \$40,000 to park improvements. The combined public and private investment in Loring Park in the 1970s and 1980s helped the park make a comeback.

In addition to experiencing the effects of the changes in the neighborhood, the park reflected a national shift in park ideology. The 1960s was a time of upheaval in the United States. Social and cultural values underwent significant changes. This was the era of the counterculture, "baby boomers" were coming of age and rebelling against the "system." This social phenomenon affected how park patrons viewed and subsequently used urban parks. Reflecting the laid-back attitude of the growing counterculture, Loring Park, along with other central city parks, morphed from a site for recreation into an informal gathering place. The renewed interest in the park was also a function of the

⁵⁸ Burt Berlowe et al., *Reflections in Loring Pond*, 24.

extension of the environmental movement to include urban open space.⁵⁹ Anti-war protests, gay rights marches, various art and musical events all became popular uses of the park. This shift in the usage of the park reflected a larger societal shift in the re-imagination of urban open space.

In the late 1990s a group of citizens, led by Ione Siegel and Dottie Speidel, banded together to reaffirm their faith in the park through the implementation of a series of physical changes. Siegel and Speidel chaired a committee that worked with the Park Board to build support and secure funding for a revitalization of the park. With funding obtained through the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, the committee hired Diana Balmori of Balmori Associates, a landscape architecture firm in New Haven, Connecticut. Balmori was presented with the task of designing a master plan for the revitalization of the park. Balmori's "renewal proposal [attempted] to keep the features that users enjoy while restoring the sense of tranquility the park's architect designed ... The master plan keeps all of the park's diverse activities—from shuffleboard and horseshoes to basketball and tennis—but moves them toward the edges of the park so that the center returns to a more tranquil place."⁶⁰

Whereas urban parks had drifted away from being "pleasure grounds" and instead were recreation facilities for most of the twentieth century, people increasingly wanted parks to return to their former glory as oases of nature within the city. The new master plan sought to restore the park after a series of changes had degraded the landscape. The era of urban decline had taken its toll; suburbanization, the construction

⁵⁹ Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 73.

⁶⁰ Mack, "Restoring Loring Park," 5B.

of I-94 and the abandonment and subsequent decline in the health of the pond had all contributed to the faltering of the park. Diana Balmori instituted a number of reforms that restored the integrity of the park by altering the landscape to more accurately reflect Cleveland's original design plan. Additions to the park included new paths, new lighting and seating, and a new performance area.⁶¹ All these changes reflected the city's commitment to improving the urban core and rekindling the connection between the city and the natural environment.

A combination of social, cultural, economic, and even philosophical factors have guided the development of Loring Park. Through the passage of time Loring Park has undergone some significant changes in form and function, evolving from a Victorian pleasure ground into a locale of Progressive reform, then into a place of crime and corruption, and finally back to something resembling its original form. All of the various eras of park development have come about as a result of the dominant social forces of that particular era. Ultimately, the history of Loring Park proves that central city parks are an integral part of the urban landscape, shaped and manipulated by the same social forces that create the city itself.

⁶¹ Diana Balmori, *Loring Park Master Plan* (New Haven, Connecticut: Balmori Associates Inc., 1996), 4.

Chapter 2: Lake Harriet

The lakes of Minneapolis are an integral part of the city's identity. The city has long prided and advertised itself as a beautiful city graced with natural amenities, the most important being the lakes. While the park system as a whole is an invaluable asset to the City of Minneapolis, it is its lakes that often define the park system and set it apart from other metropolitan areas. The Chain of Lakes, a district in western Minneapolis that includes Lake Harriet, Lake Calhoun, Lakes of the Isles, and Cedar Lake, is an ideal place to study the recreational aspect of urban parks. Lake Harriet, in particular, serves as an interesting example of park development. As a park whose history is defined by the development of recreation, entertainment, and cheap amusements, Lake Harriet provides an alternative model for park development from the one utilized at Loring Park. Whereas the development of Loring Park was driven by ideological concerns about the function of an urban park, Lake Harriet's development was driven largely by private development and the accompanying commercialization and commodification that came along with it. Developed through a collaborative initiative between the Park Board and the streetcar line, Lake Harriet was always more of a commercial venture than an oasis from the city. Being located five miles from the city center also affected people's perceptions of Lake Harriet, making it more of a suburban park, rather than a true urban park. As a destination park, Lake Harriet attracted people from all over the metropolitan area, and was therefore less dependent on the vitality of the city than Loring Park. The history of Lake Harriet as a commercial venture reflects the social forces surrounding its creation and evolution.

While the development of Lake Harriet as an entertainment and recreational facility sets it apart from other early urban parks, such as Loring Park, it places it within a

well established framework of leisure and recreation. Recreation has been an integral part of the human experience for hundreds, even thousands of years. One of the main ways that humans have negotiated a relationship with the natural world over time is through recreation, both passive and active. In medieval times, when recreation began to become popular in many social circles, recreational activities such as hunting, jousting, and archery dominated people's leisure time. With the passage of time and the advent of industrialization, and subsequently urbanization, the nature of recreation evolved and solidified into an official movement in the early years of the twentieth century.⁶²

Whereas in the pleasure ground era parks were created to ensure the physical well-being of urban residents, the recreation era placed an increased importance on maintaining the mental health and happiness of park patrons. Educators, health experts, and civic leaders alike all celebrated the power of recreation to maintain the vitality of urban dwellers. The emergence of an official recreation movement occurred in conjunction with a variety of other social movements including the playground movement, the adult education movement, and the kindergarten movement to name a few. Around the turn of the twentieth the century, as urban factory workers had more free time, organized recreation began to flourish in urban centers. Municipal authorities built and organized all types of recreational activities as recreation became a fixture in American urban parks.⁶³ An understanding of the history of recreation provides a context within which to understand the importance of Lake Harriet's development as a

⁶² Norman P. Miller and Duane M. Robinson, *The Leisure Age: Its Challenge to Recreation* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), 88.

⁶³ Martin H. Neumeyer and Esther S. Neumeyer, *Leisure and Recreation: A Study of Leisure and Recreation in their Sociological Aspects* (New York: the Ronald Press Company, 1958), 65-97; S.R. Slavson, *Recreation and the Total Personality* (New York: Association Press, 1946), 1-26.

recreational facility, focused specifically on entertainment and cheap, commercialized amusements.

While its emphasis on recreation and entertainment was the main reason that Lake Harriet developed differently than other pleasure ground era urban parks, there were a number of other factors that led to the manifestation of the Park Board's holdings on the shores of Lake Harriet as a commercial destination rather than a traditional Victorian-era pleasure ground. As mentioned previously, the park's distance from the city at its inception clearly demarcated it as a place outside of the city as opposed to being an oasis within it. Another important factor that led to the park's development into a place of recreation and entertainment was the public-private partnership between the streetcar company and the Park Board that played a large role in its creation. Though it was formed during the pleasure ground era, its location and the unique circumstances surrounding its development led to Lake Harriet's emergence as a place of commercialized recreation and entertainment.

Far from being an untouched piece of nature when it was acquired by the Minneapolis Park Board in 1886, the land surrounding Lake Harriet had a long and storied history of human alteration and interaction. Long before Lake Harriet became a destination for residents of Minneapolis, it had been an area of significance to Native Americans, namely the Dakota. As hunters and gatherers, the Dakota did not have permanent homes, but Lake Harriet was a place they returned to year after year. In 1819 Lawrence Taliaferro was appointed as the federal Indian agent for the area. Taliaferro, attempting to teach the Indians the ways of whites, taught the Indians to farm, and by 1830 Eatonville, as the Indian settlement was now known, had 80 acres of land under

cultivation.⁶⁴ However, the arrival of whites in the area did not bring peace and prosperity to all areas of Native American life. Since the Sioux and the Chippewa both made their home in this area, they were subsequently frequently at war with one another over territorial disputes. One such dispute took place in the summer of 1839 when the Chippewa killed many Sioux, and as revenge the Sioux killed seventy Chippewas and hung their scalps on some trees on the north end of the lake.⁶⁵ Citing gruesome events such as the one just described as evidence of the savagery of the Native Americans, white missionaries, who had recently come to the area, began attempts to convert the Indians into peaceful Christians. Samuel and Gideon Pond arrived and settled at Lake Calhoun in 1834 and a year later, with Reverend J.D. Stevens, opened a school at Lake Harriet with the express purpose of converting Indians to Christianity.⁶⁶ The mission school did not end the violence and unrest between the warring tribes, and in 1839 the Dakota relocated to the south side of the Minnesota River, opening up the land at Lake Harriet for white settlers.⁶⁷

In addition to the arrival of missionaries in the early nineteenth century, the presence of whites on the land during that time period also came in the form United States military officers. The first military presence in the area came in 1819 under the direction of Colonel Leavenworth, an Army officer dispatched to the frontier to establish a fort that would later become Fort Snelling. It was Colonel Leavenworth who gave the lake its name. One day when he was horseback riding around the vast, undeveloped area

⁶⁴ Penny Petersen et al., *Down at the Lake: A Historical Portrait of Linden Hills and the Lake Harriet District* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Linden Hills History Study Group, 2001), 11.

⁶⁵ Ruth Thompson and Paul Thompson, *Life with Lake Harriet* (Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society, 1940), 2.

⁶⁶ Petersen et al., *Down at the Lake*, 103.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 15.

he had come to survey, he came across a beautiful lake and named it after his wife, Harriet Lovejoy Leavenworth. Thus the lake came to have a “western” name. An understanding of the history of Lake Harriet in its pre-park days is essential in establishing that the development of a park at Lake Harriet was not an act of preservation of wild nature, but rather the latest in a series of interactions between man and the natural environment.

Despite the initial happenings at Lake Harriet in the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was not until the end of the century that the lake became a destination for residents of Minneapolis. These early visitors came to the lake to pursue recreational activities. Lake Harriet quickly became a place to escape the ills of the city while relaxing in a beautiful setting and participating in recreational pursuits. The various types of recreation that people enjoyed included picknicking, walking by the lake, boating and fishing. Before the arrival of the Park Board, many people participated in casual, passive recreational pursuits at Lake Harriet.

In the 1870s citizens began to complain that Lake Harriet was becoming an elite destination, inaccessible to ordinary people. The lobbying of these agitated citizens combined with the economic boom that graced Minneapolis in the 1880s led to the extension of the streetcar lines, operated by the Lyndale Railway Company, to locations outside the city center. In 1879 the rail line reached Lake Calhoun, and the following year made it out to Lake Harriet. The year after that, the railway line extended all the way to Lake Minnetonka, and subsequently changed its name to the Minneapolis, Lyndale, and Minnetonka Railway. In this pre-automobile era, the streetcar line provided city dwellers with access to Lake Harriet. While the conception of Lake Harriet as a refuge from the

city was part of the ideological basis for the park, it was not the dominant factor influencing people to flock to Lake Harriet in large numbers. The main attraction at Lake Harriet was the pursuit of recreation, in the form of boating, fishing, as well as the enjoyment of entertainment.⁶⁸

Even with the extension of the streetcar line, the Park Board remained hesitant about acquiring land at Lake Harriet. In 1872, while serving in the United States Congress, Colonel William King, offered to sell the city 250 acres of land around Lake Harriet for \$50,000. Critics accused King of trying to scam the city while unloading his real estate holdings. The mentality in the mid-nineteenth century was not a favorable climate for urban park development. While it was experiencing significant growth, Minneapolis was still a frontier town, trying to promote economic growth in the attempt of building the town into a major urban center. This goal was at the forefront of the minds of many of the city's civic and political leaders. Being a frontier town surrounded by vast expanses of undeveloped land, the need to set aside open space seemed unnecessary. Minneapolis' civic leaders resisted the urge to purchase the land at Lake Harriet initially because the economic growth of the city was at the forefront of their minds. They could not reconcile setting aside land as parkland rather than developing the land for profit. However, the arrival of Horace Cleveland in Minneapolis in the 1870s changed the way that civic leaders thought about parkland.⁶⁹ Cleveland's "Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkways," the speech that convinced city leaders to form a Park Board and set

⁶⁸ For more on the emergence of active recreation in urban parks see Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), 73-106; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What we will: Workers and Leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 127-152; Dulles, *A History of Recreation*, 211-229.

⁶⁹ Cleveland. *Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkways*.

aside park land for ideological, public health, and economic reasons, was extremely persuasive in convincing the city to acquire land at the lakes, which Cleveland maintained would be particularly valuable in the future. The ultimate acquisition of Lake Harriet by the Park Board in 1886-7 represented great foresight and a faith in the “future greatness of the city.”⁷⁰

When the Park Board acquired the lake in 1886-87, it looked very different from the lakeshore that we know today. Located approximately five miles from the center of Minneapolis, Lake Harriet was on the outskirts of town and thus remained largely undeveloped, even after the economic boom of the early 1880s. Oak savannas and prairies dotted the surrounding area while tamarack swamps bordered the low-lying edges of the lake. The lake looked much as it had for hundreds of years, dominated by symbols of untamed nature, including loons and wild rice.⁷¹ While the natural state pleased some visitors, such as Henry David Thoreau, it did not meet the standards for an urban park.⁷²

In accordance with the plans outlined in Cleveland’s “Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkways,” one of the first acts implemented by the Park Board at Lake Harriet was the establishment of roads and paths along the lakeshore. Some of the existing banks were graded down and additional fill was dredged from the lake bottom in order to stabilize the shores of the lake enough to support roads and paths.⁷³ In later years, acting to fulfill both his dreams and the dreams of his predecessors, Superintendent Theodore Wirth worked hard to complete the establishment of a parkway around Lake Harriet, as

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Petersen et al., *Down at the Lake*, 64.

⁷² Ibid, 28.

⁷³ Ibid, 65.

well as the other lakes in the Chain of Lakes. The creation of the parkways was a crucial step in the creation of the park at Lake Harriet as they provided people with access to the lakes and allowed them to enjoy a drive or walk around the lake.

Several camps opposed the construction of the parkways. Residents of the Linden Hills neighborhoods were opposed for financial reasons, as they did not want to be charged additional assessments. Others had ideological concerns that the construction of the parkways compromised the very nature they were built to make accessible. Theodore Wirth lamented “the strong and persistent desire on the part of the residents of the Lake Harriet district to preserve the existing natural conditions of the area.”⁷⁴ Although they vehemently opposed the alterations to the landscape, the protesters were in the minority. Wirth, and the Park Board, believed that parks were for people to use and that nature was for men to alter as they saw fit. Subsequently, in the case of Lake Harriet, the Park Board made significant alterations and improvements in order to produce an environment conducive to recreation, entertainment, and other forms of cheap amusements. By privileging recreation and commerce over preservation, the alterations to the parkway reinforced Lake Harriet’s status as a commercial venture, rather than a slice of nature in the city. The transformation of the lake into a more desirable form mirrored the events that occurred at Loring Lake twenty years earlier. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, park development was predominantly anthropocentric, putting the needs and wants of humans at the forefront of alterations and modifications to the natural landscape.

⁷⁴ Wirth, *Minneapolis Park System: 1883- 1944*, 118.

The physical changes to the landscape were matched by changes to the built environment instigated by the Minneapolis, Lyndale, and Minnetonka Railway Streetcar owners. The company sought to expand its commercial holdings at the lakes through the construction of a pavilion to attract additional patrons to the streetcar lines. Thomas Lowry, the head of the railway company, led this push to make Lake Harriet an entertainment destination in order to boost ticket sales on the streetcar lines. Lowry's lobbying and influence led to the completion of the first pavilion at Lake Harriet in 1888. The Park Board had no rights or ownership to the pavilion since it was built on the property directly surrounding the streetcar line and was thus owned solely by Lowry and the streetcar line. The 1888 pavilion was very grand, with over 300 feet of lakeside frontage and two large seating areas whose combined capacity exceeded 2,000.⁷⁵ Concerts took place every evening, as well as on Sunday afternoons. The construction of the pavilion solidified the place of entertainment as a main component of the landscape at Lake Harriet.

The relationship between the streetcar line and the Park Board was more than a fortunate symbiosis; it was an official business partnership. From 1892-1902 the Park Board and the streetcar line owners were business partners. Under the terms of their business agreement, the streetcar company was responsible for providing the entertainment at Lake Harriet, as approved by the Park Board. In exchange, the Park Board subsidized some of the entertainment costs with revenue generated through the leasing of boats at the lake. The idea was that the streetcar company would benefit from increased profits while the Park Board would benefit by luring more people to the park.

⁷⁵ Peter Sussman, "Lake Harriet Station, 1890-1954," *Minneapolis Gazette*, January/February 1985, 14.

The carefully crafted business venture at Lake Harriet was threatened in 1891 when tragedy struck and the grand 1888 pavilion burned to the ground in a fire. Because the streetcar company had been reaping considerable profits from the entertainment provided at Lake Harriet, they immediately replaced the destroyed pavilion. Lowry and the railway, making the best of unfortunate circumstances, built a new pavilion that corrected many of the faults of the previous one. The main fault of the 1888 pavilion had been the inconvenience of patrons having to pass through the pavilion in order to access the lake. In order to avoid this quandary, the railway needed to relocate the pavilion and place it on park board land. This required the railway to lease a strip of property along the shoreline on which to build the pavilion. The streetcar owners secured a 10 year lease from the Park Board and architect Harry Jones designed a new and improved pavilion.⁷⁶ The second Lake Harriet pavilion, known as the Pagoda Pavilion due to its resemblance to a traditional Chinese timber pagoda with patterned wood shingles, was completed in time for an August 15th concert in the summer of 1891.⁷⁷ The Pagoda pavilion, which was 75 by 150 feet, contained a dining room on the first floor, as well as sheltered concert seating on the second floor. Additionally, the new pavilion featured a floating bandstand.⁷⁸ The floating bandstand, which was intended to allow music to be heard on both levels, faced much opposition from the musicians who found it hard to play when water was soaking their feet and waves were crashing against them as they tried to play.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁷ Petersen et al., *Down at the Lake*, 76.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 77.

The floating bandstand structure was short-lived, as it was destroyed in 1902 by a windstorm that ripped it from its moorings and tore it apart.⁷⁹

Complementing the bandstands and pavilions built at Lake Harriet over the years were a series of other structures that further reinforced the park's status as a commercial venue. Perhaps most notable of all the structures was a combination concession stand, refreshment place, and refectory. The operation of the concession has been a way for the Minneapolis Park Board to produce revenue for over a hundred years. The Lake Harriet concession stand has special significance as it was the first concession stand instituted by the Park Board. It was first opened in 1887 when the Park Board sold Chas. McReeve the right to sell refreshments and let boats for a fee of \$1,250 for the season.⁸⁰ While the park board initially contracted out the concession stand, they later decided it would be in the best interest of the park board, monetarily, if they directly ran the concession. As a result the Park Board fully took control of refectory operations in 1889. In 1904 the Park Board decided to revert to its previous practice of leasing out the refectory. The proprietor who took control of the refectory this time around was J.H. Eschman. In addition to running the refectory, Eschman also operated a pony track and kept several ostriches at the lake. The arrangement with Mr. Eschman was short lived and in 1908 the Park Board once again resumed control of its refreshment stand.⁸¹ In alternately operating and leasing the refectory at Lake Harriet the Park Board was involved in a calculated business venture, intended to optimize their real estate holdings, rather than generate moral uplift. The ideological reasons for the development of urban parks were overshadowed at Lake

⁷⁹ Penny Peterson, "An Historical Look at Lake Harriet's Beautiful Pavilions," *Lake Area News*, August 1989, 28.

⁸⁰ "New Lake Harriet Refectory Planned," *Lake Area News*, August 1989.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Harriet by a strong emphasis on commerce and revenue production. In contrast with Loring Park, which had been built as an antidote to urban life, Lake Harriet was an orchestrated business venture which embodied the ideals of commercialized leisure.

The public-private partnership that had defined Lake Harriet in its early years was threatened in the mid 1890s. During this period bicycles became very popular and people began using them for both transportation as well as recreation. This “bicycle craze” prompted the streetcar company to take action. In order to sustain patronage of its streetcar line the company took drastic measures and altered the type of entertainment it offered at the pavilion. The music acts were no longer enough to lure people to the park. The streetcar company began to introduce vaudeville acts to the Lake Harriet playbill. The Park Board, led by President William Folwell, was outraged. Folwell vehemently expressed his opposition, declaring that such acts were inappropriate for a public park, which was meant to be a family space.

On March 6, 1903 the Pagoda pavilion met the same fate as the previous pavilion when it burst into flames, marking a turning point in the history of public-private relations at Lake Harriet. It was at this time that the streetcar company decided to end its partnership with the Park Board at Lake Harriet as it was argued that it had been “a losing venture.”⁸² While the transit company ended its connection to the lake, it completed one last act toward furthering the future success at the lake by donating the \$15,000 insurance settlement towards rebuilding a new pavilion. That money coupled with another \$15,000

⁸² Sussman, “Lake Harriet Station, 1890-1954,” 16.

donated by the Retail Dealers Association allowed the Park Board to begin construction on a new pavilion.⁸³

The third pavilion at Lake Harriet went up in 1904. Following the exit of the transit company from affairs at Lake Harriet, the Park Board was the sole owner of the 1904 pavilion. Harry Jones, the architect of the previous pavilions at the Lake, designed the 1904 Pavilion, which is commonly referred to as the Classical Pavilion. The Classical Pavilion was the largest and most elaborate of all the pavilions that have graced the shores of Lake Harriet over the years. Measuring 200 feet by 200 feet, the structure featured two wings that impressively extended out over the water, a rooftop garden that could seat 2,000, and a café on the lower level. Additionally, the new pavilion featured a fenced in swimming area that further promoted recreation at the lake.⁸⁴ It was during the era of the Classical Pavilion that entertainment at Lake Harriet reached its pinnacle, attracting the largest crowds.

In addition to the popularity of entertainment, and the commodification of the park as an entertainment venue, commercialization and recreation came to the park in other ways as well.⁸⁵ The most popular recreational activity at Lake Harriet was the renting of boats. While boating had occurred on Lake Harriet for hundreds of years in the form of Native American canoes, the first boating opportunity for park-goers came in the 1880s. Boating's popularity peaked in the 1912 with over 800 boats recorded on the lake, 600 of them being private canoes. People often combined the recreational and

⁸³ Peterson, "An Historical Look at Lake Harriet's Beautiful Pavilions," 29.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 29.

⁸⁵ Terry Nichols Clark, ed., *The City as an Entertainment Machine* (New York: Elsevier, 2004), 19-132. For more on urban recreation and leisure see Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 127- 143.

entertainment pursuits offered at Lake Harriet by floating in their canoes while listening to the evening's music selection.⁸⁶ The rental of boats at Lake Harriet further reinforced its status as a commercial venue. While some commercial ventures exist at other urban parks, such as a small concession stand and the renting of boats at Loring Park, they are usually a small side venture, rather than the dominant aspect of the park. Throughout its history, the extensive presence of commercial activities as a main feature at Lake Harriet has distinguished it from other urban parks, which tend to be viewed as an escape from, rather than an extension of, the commerce of the city.

Around 1910, the Classical Pavilion began to deteriorate and plans were made to renovate and revitalize the structure. In 1912 the Park Board completed a much-needed \$10,000 renovation project on the pavilion.⁸⁷ However, as time wore on and heavy usage continued, it became clear that much more extensive renovations were needed. As a result of extensive ice damage, concerts were no longer held on the rooftop after 1923, as the structure was deemed unsafe.⁸⁸ Additional plans were put together in the 1920s for further renovations, but before the slated renovations could take place, the pavilion, like all the other pavilions before it, prematurely met its demise. On July 8, 1925 a severe windstorm swept across Minneapolis wreaking havoc all over the city. Nearly 100 people flocked to the Classical Pavilion in attempts to seek shelter from the wrath of the storm. When the storm ripped the pavilion to pieces shortly after 7 o'clock, two people inside the pavilion were killed, Mrs. Emma Miller and her 3 year old daughter May.⁸⁹ If the

⁸⁶ Ruth Thompson, "Lake Harriet Pavilion a Great Social Center," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 25 November 1946.

⁸⁷ Cornelia Einsweiler, "Fixit," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 4 February 1985, p. 5C.

⁸⁸ Peterson, "An Historical Look at Lake Harriet's Beautiful Pavilions," 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

storm had occurred half an hour later the loss of life would have been much greater as the evening's concert would have been in full swing at the time. As it happened, the storm had knocked out power to most of the city, so most of the musicians and concert goers were stranded on stopped streetcars.⁹⁰ The parts of the pavilion that were not destroyed by the storm were razed to make way for yet another replacement.

After the windstorm of 1925 there was a considerable amount of debate over where to locate the new pavilion and bandstand. The Park Board debated not only whether or not the bandstand should be rebuilt, but also how much they were willing to spend, how large the new structure should be, and exactly where it should be located. Theodore Wirth, the man known as the father of recreation in the Minneapolis Parks System, wanted to build a large new pavilion on the North side of the lake, away from the noise of the streetcars. His plan consisted of a new concert pavilion as well as a separate dance pavilion, all of which would cost approximately \$125,000 to \$150,000 to build.⁹¹ The attempted expansion of the recreational and entertainment facilities at Lake Harriet mirrored a larger, national trend of converting urban parks into places of recreation. As a result, the Minneapolis Park Board was increasingly focusing on recreation and thus attempting to add recreational amenities to all of its parks. For park officials, "the focus was no longer just on preservation or restoration of health but on the pursuit of happiness itself."⁹² In order to meet demand, the Park Board installed recreational amenities at parks all over Minneapolis, with a particular emphasis on the installation of playgrounds

⁹⁰ Beatrice Morosco, "Yesterdays," *Lake Harriet Courier*, 3 August 1967.

⁹¹ Tom Balcom, "Landmarks on the Lake, Part II," *Southside Journal*, January 1984, 24.

⁹² Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 106.

and areas for organized sports, such as baseball fields.⁹³ Wirth's desire to expand the recreational offerings at Lake Harriet was a part of this larger shift towards making recreation the focus in urban parks.

As much as Wirth's plan for a new pavilion reflected the larger societal trends regarding urban parks, it did not reflect the views of the Minneapolis residents who would be footing the bill in the form of increased taxes. Several neighborhood organizations surrounding the lake, including the Lake Harriet Improvement Association, the Linden Hills Protective Association, and the 13th Ward Taxpayer's Association all vehemently opposed increased taxes. Additionally, the neighborhood organizations were opposed to Wirth's desire to relocate the pavilion away from its traditional location. Neighborhood opposition to the Park Board's plans was as old as the park itself; there had always been a struggle between the neighborhoods who wanted to preserve the lake as a natural area and the Park Board, which wanted to make the park conducive for recreational use by the general public. The opposition eventually overwhelmed Wirth and he was forced to abandon his plans for expanding the scope of recreation and entertainment in the park.

The failure to build the enlarged bandstand and pavilion was by no means a rejection of entertainment at Lake Harriet. Rather the adoption of a plan to build a small, temporary bandstand near the original site reflected the power of neighborhood organizations combined with budgetary shortfalls to influence the direction of urban parks. External factors sometimes play a larger role in determining the manifestations of urban parks than ideological ones. When it was finally built in 1927 for roughly \$10,000,

⁹³ Wirth, *Minneapolis Park System: 1883- 1944*, 246-252.

the new, “temporary” bandstand was 80 feet by 30 feet and was located slightly to the west of the 1891 and 1904 sites. This bandstand proved to be far from temporary and actually stood until 1985, longer than any of the previous bandstands or pavilions.

For the next fifty years, Lake Harriet continued to be an entertainment destination for people from Minneapolis and beyond. Crowds continued to flock to the lake to enjoy concerts, go for a swim, or canoe on the lake.⁹⁴ The Park Board reinforced the dominance of recreation at Lake Harriet by hiring a recreation director. Following that hire, recreation became more organized and more prominent. While many people feared that decreased funding would hinder the parks during the Great Depression, the opposite was true. With people short on cash, they increasingly went to the lake to escape their daily struggles and partake in recreational pursuits. Additionally the Great Depression ushered in the New Deal which provided resources, in the form of money and labor, to renovate the park and recreation facilities.⁹⁵

Lake Harriet flourished in the years following the conclusion of World War II. The population boom that came at the end of World War II, coupled with increased access by way of the automobile led to an increase in patronage at Lake Harriet in the 1940s and 50s. During the 1940s and 50s when central city parks, like Loring Park, suffered from the growing car culture and accompanying exodus from the central cities, parks like Lake Harriet continued to attract visitors. Whereas the increased mobility resulting from the growing car culture led to the demise of Loring Park, Lake Harriet benefited from people’s increased mobility as more people could now access the park.

⁹⁴ Christopher M. Law, *Urban Tourism: The Visitor Economy and the Growth of Large Cities* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 73- 96; David Gray and Donald Pelegrino, *Reflections on the Recreation and Park Movement: A Book of Readings* (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1973), 26-86, 225-275.

⁹⁵ C. Ben Wright, *Minneapolis Parks and Recreation*.

Lake Harriet's distance from the city center once again shaped the character of the park, as residents from all over the metropolitan area flocked to Lake Harriet as it was increasingly seen as a metropolitan park, rather than a traditional urban park.⁹⁶

While Lake Harriet remained a popular destination throughout the twentieth century, the infrastructure of the park itself suffered as the Park Board allocated its increasingly limited resources elsewhere. The park finally got some much needed attention in 1985 when the Park Board demolished the "temporary" 1927 bandstand after many years of citizen groups calling for its destruction and replacement by a more permanent structure, more appropriate for Minneapolis, a city with such a renowned reputation in parks. Residents felt it was a disgrace to have this dilapidated structure when the Chain of Lakes was supposed to be the "crown jewel" of the Minneapolis Park System. Residents lamented the fact that Lake Harriet attracted top-of-the-line performers, but then relegated them to a lackluster facility. The residents were finally appeased in 1986 with the construction of a new bandstand that resembled the 1891 pagoda pavilion. The new pavilion is significantly smaller than previous pavilions measuring just 30 feet by 82 feet.⁹⁷ Despite its small size, the new pavilion has revitalized the entertainment scene at Lake Harriet and ensured that the park remains a bastion in the Minneapolis Park System, attracting visitors who want to take a swim, rent a canoe, or take in an outdoor concert.

The history of Lake Harriet represents a departure from the traditional pleasure ground parks that dominated the early years of the American urban park movement. In contrast to the traditional conception of the park as an escape from the city, Lake Harriet

⁹⁶ Peter Sussman, e-mail to author, March 26, 2007.

⁹⁷ Peterson, "An Historical Look at Lake Harriet's Beautiful Pavilions," 29.

was developed as a commercial facility to meet the entertainment needs of its patrons. “Park departments put themselves on par with commercial producers of entertainment commodities ... they made themselves subject to demand rather than to a norm of public service not necessarily reflected in demand.”⁹⁸ The proliferation of recreation, entertainment, and commercialization at Lake Harriet represented an alternative framework utilized by humans to reconcile the urban landscape with the natural landscape. Loring Park and Lake Harriet represent two alternative attempts to merge the urban landscape with the natural world. Whereas Loring Park attempts to make a strong distinction between the two, Lake Harriet attempts to more fully integrate the urban and the natural landscape. The strong influence of social forces in the development of Lake Harriet proves that urban parks, irrespective of their form and function, are a reflection of the social values of their creators and patrons.

⁹⁸ Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 107.

Chapter 3: Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary

The story of the development of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is vastly different from that of both Loring Park and Lake Harriet. Many of the differences are quite obvious: the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was developed nearly a century after the formation of Loring Park and Lake Harriet, the sanctuary is in St. Paul, rather than Minneapolis, and the main impetus for the development of the park came from disgruntled citizens rather than professional landscape architects. For all the differences between the three parks, of which there are many, the motivations for park development have remained largely the same. While the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is, assuredly, a more modern manifestation of the dichotomy between cities and nature, it remains part of the larger context of the continually evolving relationship between humans and the natural world. The creation of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was a result of the increased awareness of environmental issues raised by the emergence of the environmental movement. Just as was the case with Loring Park and Lake Harriet, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is a social creation that reflects the societal concerns prominent at the time of its creation.

While no urban park is a preserved piece of nature, the level of human alteration on the site of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary distinguishes it from many other urban parks. As a former industrial waste site reclaimed and revitalized by a coalition of citizen groups, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary challenges many preconceived notions of urban parks and marks a distinct shift in the way that people have related to the natural environment in the city. With the development of this most recent model of urban park development, humans have begun to engage their relationship with the natural landscape

in a much more direct way. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is the latest in a series of urban parks that have been created as a reflection of social values to meet the perceived needs of the urban community.

The development of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is as much a story about urban park development as it is a story about community organizing and the power of dedicated citizens to make a difference, and mold their community into something they are proud to call home. In the late 1990s a group of citizens on the East Side of Saint Paul, unified under the pre-existing organization Friends of Swede Hollow, banded together to seek a way to connect the bluff communities to the river. The communities on the bluff have traditionally been isolated from the river, separated by the industrial lands. A group of committed citizens recognized the need to connect those communities to the river in order to connect people to the natural environment. Echoing the beliefs of early park designers of the nineteenth century, these community organizers believed that a connection to nature was beneficial, and necessary, for all citizens. In addition to their desire to create park land for human enjoyment, the organizers also wanted to preserve the ecological and historical integrity of the land.

Community organizers felt so passionately about this twenty-five acre swath of land along the Mississippi River because they wanted to preserve its historical, cultural, and ecological significance. Ecologically, the land is significant as it is part of the Mississippi River floodplain and as such serves several ecosystem functions. Significant amounts of the land were formerly wetlands, which perform a number of important ecosystem functions including natural water quality improvement, flood mitigation, and

shoreline erosion protection.⁹⁹ Additionally, the land is part of a migratory flyway, which is critical to the survival of various bird species. Transformation of the land into an urban park would

The land is also important both historically and culturally, particularly to Native American peoples. Its geological characteristics made the land a sacred Native American site. The confluence of Trout Brook and Lower Phalen Creek was a place used by the Dakota people for both trade and ceremonial purposes.¹⁰⁰ The Native Americans also revered the land, believing that the high bluffs were a sacred overlook from which to view the surrounding lands. A cave at the site, known as Wakan-tebee, “dwelling of the Great Spirit,” was especially sacred as it was believed to be the place where the Dakota people originated.¹⁰¹ In addition to revering the land as a sacred spot for tribal meetings and burials, the Dakota also established a village nearby called Kaposia. From 1730 to 1830 a small band of Dakota inhabited the land that is now the sanctuary. The first European presence on the land came in 1767 in the form of an exploratory mission seeking the elusive Northwest Passage, led by Jonathon Carver. Due to Carver’s “discovery” the ancient cave at the site came to be known as Carver’s Cave. The presence of Native Americans on the land came to an end with the treaty of 1837 that relocated the Dakota and Ojibwa who had been living there.¹⁰² Thus the Native Americans were

⁹⁹ United States Environmental Protection Agency, “Wetlands Functions and Values,” <http://www.epa.gov/watertrain/wetlands/> (accessed March 4, 2007). For more on the ecological importance of open space see Joseph James Shomon, *Open Land for Urban America: Acquisition, Safekeeping, and Use* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 22-37.

¹⁰⁰ Lower Phalen Creek Project, “Vento Sanctuary Background: Reclaiming and Restoring an Urban Natural Area,” <http://www.phalencreek.org> (accessed February 25, 2007).

¹⁰¹ Laura Yuen, “Sacred Site is reborn as city sanctuary,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 19 May 2005, p. 5A.

¹⁰² Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek : Improving our Watershed, Revitalizing our Communities* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Martin & Pitz Associates with Barr Engineering, 2001), 15.

removed from the land as residents, but the land remained important to them spiritually for decades to come.

Following the relocation of the Native Americans in 1837, the land was opened up to settlement. For a brief period, the land was farmed by settlers. That era quickly came to an end as the land was much more valuable to the railroads than to farmers. In 1862 railroad construction began, thus ushering in the industrial era that would dominate the land for the next one hundred years. The floodplain was a valuable piece of land for the Burlington-Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad company as it was flat, open and therefore served as a perfect spot for loading and unloading cargo, as well as performing maintenance on the trains.¹⁰³ The Phalen Creek floodplain and valley was also a valuable site for the BNSF as a result of its geological features. The sandstone bluffs created soft slopes that allowed “the trains to gently climb out of the riverbed and avoid St. Paul’s steep bluffs.”¹⁰⁴ As St. Paul’s prominence as a transportation center grew, the amount of traffic crossing the floodplain expanded exponentially. In 1880, St. Paul was the railroad hub of the northwest United States. As business expanded, the railroad company needed more land. In order to acquire more land for transferring and trafficking cargo, the railroad company removed 75 feet of the bluff through a series of explosions. While this alteration to the land made strategic sense for the railroad company, it severely altered the land, destroying Carver’s Cave in the process. In addition to the destruction of the bluff, BNSF ecologically scarred the land in other ways as well, including the filling of

¹⁰³ Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Yuen, “Sacred Site is reborn as city sanctuary,” 5A.

ecologically significant wetlands, the removal of many trees, and the contamination and compaction of the soil.¹⁰⁵

The era of railroad domination came to an end in the late 1960s, and in 1970, BNSF moved its switching and maintenance operations elsewhere. Following the relocation, BNSF abandoned the railroad yard.¹⁰⁶ The relaxed patrol of the land led to its decline. People began to think of the land as a dumping ground, disposing of tires, mattresses, appliances, furniture, and illegal chemicals on the site. In addition, homeless people began to frequent the site, often erecting camps for days or weeks at a time.¹⁰⁷ The slow destruction and decline of land that was significant in so many ways saddened many residents of the surrounding neighborhoods of Dayton's Bluff and Swede Hollow.

The end of the railroad era coincided with the emergence of an environmental movement in the United States. The modern environmental movement must be understood in context. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of great unrest and subsequent change. People were concerned with civil rights, women's rights, and rebellion against the materialistic culture that post-war prosperity had created in the United States. People were also increasingly aware of their surroundings, and subsequently concerned with the environment. They identified nature as the opposite of the materialistic, suburban culture that they loathed. The refusal to accept pollution as a necessary cost of progress, the discovery of many environmental hazards produced by technology, and the development of ecology all contributed to the rise of the modern environmental movement in the

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.phalencreek.org> (accessed February 25, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

1960s.¹⁰⁸ Though the movement started out small, it steadily gained support and eventually forced people to reevaluate the way they looked at the environment, as well as their relationship to it. The movement's ideas infiltrated many levels of society, including the urban park movement.

In addition to the confluence of the increased awareness of environmental issues with the abandonment of the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain, the 1970s also marked a period of governmental disinterest in urban parkland.¹⁰⁹ The budgetary and bureaucratic shortcomings of those in positions of governmental authority related to urban parks, led to the need for a creative, innovative solution to the problem of inadequate and deteriorating parks. By understanding the issues related to urban parks in the 1970s, it becomes clear that the formation of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was both influenced by external factors affecting urban parks as a whole, but also driven by the commitment of concerned citizens to revitalize their neighborhood by linking it to the river and the vitality of downtown through a series of trail connections.¹¹⁰ The emergence of the environmental movement and the decrease in funding for parks set the stage for a new, community-based framework for creating urban parks.

In Saint Paul, one of the initial manifestations of the greater awareness of environmental issues that came about because of the environment movement was the formation of the Friends of Swede Hollow, an organization that laid the groundwork for

¹⁰⁸ Adam Rome, "Give Earth a Chance: The Environmental Movement of the Sixties," *Journal of American History* 90 Issue 2 (September 2003): 2. For more on the environmental movement see Robert J. Brulle, *Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 181; Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 81-114; Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁹ Michael Hough, *City Form and Natural Processes* (London: Routledge, 1984), 251.

¹¹⁰ Vicki Monks, "Off the Tracks," *Land & People*, Spring 2006.

the eventual creation of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. Friends of Swede Hollow “began as a grassroots initiative to reestablish a link from Swede Hollow Park to the river.”¹¹¹ While the formation of the Friends of Swede Hollow was created to create a park at Swede Hollow, not on the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain, it was an important milestone as it united many community members dedicated to connecting the East Side neighborhoods to the river. The formation of the Friends of Swede Hollow established a precedent for community organizing around urban park and open space issues on the East Side of St. Paul, setting the stage for the movement to create the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.

In 1996, neighborhood organizations, community councils, and other concerned citizens lamenting the decline of this valuable, historic piece of land, began to organize with the common goal of revitalizing the key swath of land that maintained a connection between their neighborhoods and the river. In this way, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary differed significantly from previous urban parks, such as Loring Park and Lake Harriet, from the very beginning. The impetus for creating an urban park on the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain was the result of a bottom up approach, rather than the top down approach that had previously dominated urban park development. A distinct shift was occurring amongst urban parks; they were becoming less mediated by elected officials, and therefore more democratic.

In 1997, the neighborhood organizations, including the Railroad Island Implementation Task Force, District 5 Payne-Phalen Planning Council, Dayton’s Bluff District 4 Community Council, and the Friends of Swede Hollow, sought out support

¹¹¹ Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 1.

from the McKnight Foundation and the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation for financial resources, planning expertise, and partnership experiences. This was the beginning of a long-standing collaboration between the various entities. The involvement of the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation also placed the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary within a much larger project: The National Great River Park. The National Great River Park is a collaborative effort between the St. Paul Division of Parks and Recreation, the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation, and the Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development “to lead a community effort to transform the valuable collection of parks, natural resources, cultural amenities and community sites [along the Mississippi River] into a single ‘National Great River Park,’ a defining feature of Minnesota’s Capital City.”¹¹² The Great River Park wanted to make the city “More Natural and More Urban.”¹¹³ This concept of revitalizing cities through reestablishing their connection to natural amenities is a model that is taking hold in cities across the country. In this latest stage of negotiations with nature, civic leaders are incorporating the natural landscape into the broader urban landscape.

Seeking to assert their commitment to incorporating open space into the urban landscape, a coalition of community organizations who were now on board with the Lower Phalen Creek project came together in July of 2001 to write a document entitled “A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek: Improving our Watershed, Revitalizing our Communities.” The purpose of the document was to solidify the mission and to set some concrete goals that the multi-faceted coalition would work towards achieving. The

¹¹² National Great River Park, “The Framework,” http://www.riverfrontcorporation.com/GRP_overview.asp. (accessed March 1, 2007).

¹¹³ Ibid.

Community Vision document marked a significant milestone for the activists and concerned citizens involved with the project. The document provided their cause with legitimacy and illustrated its place in a larger framework of ecological and historical preservation. The conglomerate of community organizations, community councils, and activists were now formally united as the Lower Phalen Creek Project.

The community vision document established four ambitious goals that would guide the project. The goals were to “improve water quality, build long term environmental stewardship programs with local youth, enhance the social and ecological value of Swede Hollow Park, and to transform the land between Swede Hollow Park and the Mississippi River into a healthy, urban green space.”¹¹⁴ The objectives of the Lower Phalen Creek Project demonstrate that the creation of an urban park on the former floodplain was just one aspect of a much larger project intended to benefit the city in economic, environmental, and social terms. As was the case with previous urban parks, such as Loring Park and Lake Harriet, the creation of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was a reflection of large societal trends as well an attempt to produce social change.

Even after the unification of the various community councils, economic development organizations, non-profit organizations, activists, and concerned citizens, the Lower Phalen Creek Project still faced many significant obstacles. One of the most significant obstacles to acquiring and transforming the land into an urban park was that as a result of industrial contamination from the railroad era the site was classified as a brownfield. No single law defines a brownfield; rather various state, local, and federal

¹¹⁴ Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 4.

agencies have varying restrictions and classification programs.¹¹⁵ The United States Environmental Protection Agency, for example, defines brownfields as “abandoned, idled, or underused industrial and commercial sites where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination that can add cost, time, or uncertainty to a redevelopment project.”¹¹⁶

The classification of a site as a brownfield presents a number of challenges for potential redevelopers. Organizations, within both the public and private sector, often hesitate to get involved with brownfield redevelopment because of the associated liability and cost. Due to the bureaucratic and financial hurdles associated with brownfields, the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain was initially for sale only to industrial buyers.¹¹⁷ Various commercial buyers expressed interest in redeveloping the land for commercial use. Two of the suggested uses for the twenty-five acre former railyard were an asphalt recycling plant or a transfer station for concrete trucks.¹¹⁸ These proposed commercial pursuits fit the traditional template for brownfield redevelopment.

While brownfields are traditionally redeveloped into commercial properties, they are occasionally transformed into urban open space. The idea of converting brownfields into parkland is perplexing to many people as former industrial wastelands might not seem like good candidates for parks. However, the location of many brownfields, close to waterways and downtowns, gives them great potential to be converted into desirable

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Glass Geltman, *Recycling Land: Understanding the Legal Landscape of Brownfield Development* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 4. For more on environmental contamination see Adeline Levine, *Love Canal: Science, Politics, and People* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1982), 1-26.

¹¹⁶ Todd S. Davis and Kevin D. Margolis, *Brownfields: A Comprehensive Guide to Redeveloping Contaminated Property* (USA: American Bar Association, 1997), 5.

¹¹⁷ Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Monks, Vicki. “Off the Tracks.”

forms of urban open space.¹¹⁹ This idea of transformation has begun to take hold at both the national and international level, with high profile projects in major metropolitan areas such as New York City, Boston, Seattle, and Paris. Paris has been especially ambitious in the development of urban parks under its current mayor Bertrand Delanoë. As a candidate in 2000, Delanoë pledged to find 75 acres within the city limits for new parks and public spaces.¹²⁰ Since then the city has transformed a number of former brownfield sites into urban parkland. Within the United States, the movement to transform brownfields into urban parks has been led largely by the Trust for Public Land, a national, non-profit land conservation organization.¹²¹ Through logistical and financial support, the Trust for Public Land has been instrumental in a number of urban park revitalization projects, including the creation of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.

One of the main obstacles in converting former industrial waste sites into parklands is dealing with the contamination of the sites. Once the land is acquired and the decision has been made to convert it into urban parkland, the next step is obtaining an environmental assessment to determine the extent of the contamination, and chart a course for remediation. At the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, the first step in this process came in 1998 with the commissioning of an environmental assessment of the site. The assessment, the “Phase One Site Assessment,” declared that the site had an increased likelihood of soil pollution due to the heavy industrial use of the land. It also found a

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Jennifer Ackerman, “Space for the Soul,” *National Geographic* October 2006, 114.

¹²¹ For more on the Trust for Public Land see <http://www.tpl.org> (accessed March 29, 2007). For more examples of brownfields that have been transformed into urban parks see Friends of the High Line, <http://www.thehighline.org/> (accessed 30 March 2007). Also see Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, <http://www.cityofseattle.net/parks/parkspaces/gasworks.htm> (accessed March 30, 2007). For more on the democratic nature of brownfield transformation see Michael Hough, *City Form and Natural Processes*, 253-8.

significant possibility of contamination in the form of petroleum products, solvents, and metals. That initial assessment was followed up by a more comprehensive analysis by Terracon, a company contracted by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. This “Phase Two Investigation” found the presence of arsenic, chromium, lead and mercury at levels harmful to both people and animals. The investigation also detected the presence of asbestos, found in the demolished buildings on the site.¹²² These assessments confirmed the site’s classification as a brownfield and ensured that significant remediation and restoration would be needed before the land could be opened to the public.

A complex web of laws and regulations on the local, state and federal level governs the cleanup of brownfield and other contaminated sites. The first piece of legislation that directly addressed this issue came in 1980, after the environmental contamination disaster at Love Canal. The leaching of chemicals that had been improperly disposed of caused health problems and birth defects for residents of the Love Canal community in western New York.¹²³ As mentioned previously, the 1970s and 1980s saw an increased awareness about environmental issues, including toxicity and contamination. This increased knowledge coupled with the disastrous effects of Love Canal, led to the passage of the first in a series of laws intended to address brownfield cleanup and prevention. On December 11, 1980 Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). CERCLA taxed the chemical and petroleum industries. while also creating a system that was intended to

¹²² Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 20.

¹²³ Eckardt C. Beck, “The Love Canal Tragedy,” <http://www.epa.gov/history/topics/lovecanal/01.htm> (accessed March 4, 2007). For more on the legal landscape of brownfields see Charles Bartsch and Richard Munson, “Restoring Contaminated Industrial Sites,” *Issues in Science and Technology* 10 (22 March 1994): 74-79.

identify and remediate chemical spills and abandoned hazardous waste sites. CERCLA proved to be extremely insufficient when applied to brownfields. The intricacies and complexities of the law made it impossible to understand and implement on a practical level.¹²⁴ The failure of environmental laws to adequately address the issue of brownfield redevelopment was one of the main factors that led to the Clinton administration's commitment to developing a new strategy for addressing the brownfield issue.

In the 1990s, the federal government worked towards making the clean up of brownfields a more attainable goal. In January 1995, then EPA Administrator Carol Browner announced a Brownfields Action Agenda. The dedication to brownfield redevelopment was reinforced by President Clinton's declaration in his state of the union address on February 5, 1997 that "we should restore contaminated urban land and buildings to productive use."¹²⁵ This statement was backed up by action later that year in May when the EPA unveiled its Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative, "designed to empower States, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, and safely clean up any sustainable reuse brownfields."¹²⁶ As part of this initiative the EPA committed itself to funding pilot programs, entering into partnerships, conducting outreach activities, addressing environmental justice concerns, and generally supporting brownfield redevelopment.¹²⁷

The Clinton administration's commitment to brownfield development was part of a larger agenda concocted to address community development issues. In a June 1996

¹²⁴ Davis and Margolis, *Brownfields*, 8.

¹²⁵ Geltman, *Recycling Land*, 305.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 305.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 305.

speech Al Gore placed brownfield redevelopment in this larger framework by declaring it “an integral part of the President’s Community Empowerment Agenda, a series of initiatives across the federal government designed to work together to provide greater opportunity to our distressed urban and rural communities.”¹²⁸ Gore further acknowledged that while “the government alone cannot solve problems of distressed communities ... [it] can be a catalyst in empowering communities with the tools to solve their own problems and in encouraging the private sector to join in those efforts.”¹²⁹ The federal commitment to transforming contaminated land was a crucial framework for ensuring the eventual development of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.

In 2002 the city finally acquired the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain, after years of hard work on behalf of the multi-faceted community coalition. The acquisition of the land was the result of the hard work and dedication of over 25 different community organizations, as well as activists and concerned citizens. The necessary funds to purchase the land came from a variety of sources, including the federal and state governments, a \$250,000 gift from the Burlington Northern Foundation, and significant assistance from the Trust for Public Land.¹³⁰ Upon acquiring the land, the Lower Phalen Creek Project conveyed it to the city of Saint Paul, which immediately incorporated it into the city’s Parks and Recreation Department.

Following the acquisition of the 27-acre swath of land, the focus of the project shifted toward clean up and ecological restoration.¹³¹ Having exhausted a large amount

¹²⁸ Davis and Margolis, *Brownfields*, xix.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, xix.

¹³⁰ Yuen, “Sacred Site is Reborn as City Sanctuary,” 5A.

¹³¹ Curt Brown, “Polluted Rail Site to Become St. Paul’s Newest Nature Park,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 22 Nov. 2002.

of resources in acquiring the land, the Lower Phalen Creek Project had to be creative in seeking funding for the expensive undertaking of restoration and remediation. In early 2003, the Lower Phalen Creek Project submitted a grant proposal to the United States Environmental Protection Agency on behalf of the City of St. Paul. The grant asked for funds to mitigate the extremely high cost of remediation and cleanup of all the toxins present at the site.¹³² In July of 2003, the Lower Phalen Creek Project received word that they had been awarded a \$400,000 grant from the USEPA brownfields program.¹³³ The receipt of the EPA grant was a major milestone for the project as it made the high cost of chemical remediation feasible. With the necessary funds secured, the first phase of construction and remediation of the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain began in the winter of 2003.

The completion of the chemical remediation was one part of a much larger, comprehensive plan to restore the sanctuary to a pre-industrial state. The second phase in the transformation came in the form of ecological restoration. Continuing with the collaborative nature of the project, the restoration process involved a variety of community organizations and partners. Various community partners organized volunteer restoration events in 2004 and 2005. Governmental involvement as well as the participation of various non-profit organizations ensured the success of the volunteer restoration events. Great River Greening and the Community Design Center of Minnesota were two such organizations that played an important role in the restoration phase of the project. The East Side Youth Conservation Corps, an affiliate program of the Community

¹³² Sarah Clark, e-mail to author, 27 Feb. 2007.

¹³³ Yuen, "Sacred Site is Reborn as City Sanctuary," 5A.

Design Center, and the 3M East Side Lab volunteers were particularly instrumental in the on-the-ground work of restoring the ecological integrity of the former railyard.

Ecological restoration, like brownfield redevelopment, is a complicated process that can not be easily defined due to the high amount of variability based on site-specific conditions. Boiled down to the simplest, least contested definition, ecological restoration involves the removal of invasive species and the planting of plant species that are known to be native to that particular ecosystem.¹³⁴ This process is justified by the fact that the presence of “native” plants often lead to a healthier, more fully functional ecosystem with high levels of ecological diversity. Invasive species tend to be detrimental as they choke out native species and often threaten the vitality and diversity of an ecosystem.

At the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, restoration efforts were primarily focused on the removal of buckthorn, the most common invasive species in the Twin Cities. Buckthorn is a shrub that thrives in oak woodlands, oak savannas, and prairies. It sprouts its leaves early in the season and retains them late into the fall, thereby shading all other species and preventing growth of native herbaceous plants.¹³⁵ Volunteers from various non-profits and community organizations in the Twin Cities all helped remove the plant that had taken over the railyard. Buckthorn removal is a highly labor intensive process that does not end with the forcible removal of the plant from the ground. Once buckthorn is removed it must be replaced immediately or else it will grow back. Various native

¹³⁴ Jelte van Andel and James Aronson, *Restoration Ecology: The New Frontier* (Malden, Mass.; Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 16-28. For more on the history of ecological restoration see Eric Higgs, *Nature by Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 93-178. For more on ecological restoration of contaminated land see Michael A. Smith, “Reclamation and Treatment of Contaminated Land,” in *Rehabilitating Damaged Ecosystems*, ed. John Cairns Jr. (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, Inc., 1988), 61-87.

¹³⁵ Great River Greening, “Common Buckthorn Fact Sheet,” <http://www.greatrivergreening.org> (accessed 4 March 2007). See also Elizabeth J. Czarapata, *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 35-41.

plants, trees, shrubs, and wetland plugs were planted by volunteers to replace the buckthorn. In addition to the removal of buckthorn, volunteers also removed debris such as furniture and tires from the park. The restoration and remediation of the former industrial site restored the ecological integrity of the site, which had been severely compromised during the railroad era.

Following the completion of the remediation and restoration of the land, the park was finally ready to welcome visitors. On May 21, 2005, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary officially opened to the public.¹³⁶ A large celebration held at the site honored the work of all the people who worked to turn a dream into a reality, while also celebrating the rich history of the land. The opening of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was a celebration of completion, but not an ending. Instead the celebration symbolized a new turn in the latest phase of human activity on the Lower Phalen Creek floodplain.

In an attempt to fully reconcile the urban landscape with the natural environment, recent urban park projects have sought to more fully integrate urban parks into the existing city. One of the ways that park developers and visionaries have tried to make that physical integration a reality is through the construction of trails and connections between new and existing parks. Since the acquisition and opening of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary the Lower Phalen Creek Project has devoted a significant amount of its time to establishing a continuous swath of open space along the river. A “green river corridor” was an overarching goal of the Lower Phalen Creek Project from the very beginning. The community leaders sought to take advantage of the sanctuary’s close proximity not only to downtown but also to other urban parks such as Mounds Park and Swede Hollow Park.

¹³⁶ Yuen, “Sacred Site is Reborn as City Sanctuary,” 5A.

The establishment of a series of connected urban parks further integrates the urban and the natural landscape by ensuring that urban parks do not exist in isolation, but rather are an integral component of the urban landscape.

This idea of a system of connected parks was not new; it had originally been brought to the Twin Cities over a hundred years earlier by famed nineteenth century landscape architect Horace Cleveland. In a speech to civic leaders in 1883, Cleveland had advocated for a system of parks and parkways, justifying his idea by claiming the Twin Cities were uniquely suited for such a comprehensive, expansive system. Echoing the views expressed by Cleveland, the organizers of the Lower Phalen Creek Project worked for the creation of a system of connecting trails to ensure access and connectivity to the park and the river for the most number of residents possible.¹³⁷ This far-reaching, city-wide effort symbolizes a commitment to engaging a wider community than just the surrounding neighborhoods. The development of this urban park truly has been collaborative and comprehensive on every level possible.

The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary has been hailed as a model for the development of urban parks. The Lower Phalen Creek Project's dedication and vision for the transformation of a former industrial waste site into a natural oasis represents a holistic view of nature and the city that does not present the two as antithetical to one another. In her book, *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design*, Anne Whiston Spirn asserts that nature and the city need to be reconciled, no longer seen in opposition to one another. "The city is neither wholly natural nor wholly contrived. It is

¹³⁷ For more on parks and parkways see Charles E. Doell and Louis Twardzik, *Elements of Park and Recreation Administration* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1973), 49-53.

not 'unnatural' but, rather, a transformation of 'wild' nature by humankind."¹³⁸ The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is the kind of urban park that we must strive for in our increasingly urban world. In the past parks have been installed as an afterthought a way to bring nature to the city. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary celebrates the interconnectedness of nature and the city by acknowledging that a park does not have to be an escape from the city, but rather can be an integral part of the urban landscape.

People have begun to recognize the important work, reconciling nature and city, being done at the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. The United States Department of Interior presented the sanctuary with the national Take Pride in America award in 2005, in recognition for the community involvement and change achieved at the site. The "Take Pride in America" award recognizes volunteer stewardship projects on public lands.¹³⁹ The combination of community initiative and involvement with volunteer restoration efforts makes the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary a model for not only urban park development but also for community building and revitalization. The activists and concerned citizens of the Lower Phalen Creek Project represent the power of individuals to make a difference in their community. The creation of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary owes its success not to politicians and city planners, but to ordinary citizens who dedicated themselves to the task of achieving their goal. The creation of the sanctuary serves not only as a model in urban park development but also as an inspiration to community organizers seeking to transform their communities through park and open space issues.

¹³⁸ Spirn, *The Granite Garden*, 4.

¹³⁹ Lower Phalen Creek Project, <http://phalencreek.org> (accessed 26 February 2007).

In 2006, the leaders of the Lower Phalen Creek Project reasserted their dedication and commitment to the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary through the commission of a “Proposal for an Updated Community Vision.” The Lower Phalen Creek Project Steering Committee decided in 2006 that the time had come to assess their accomplishments and determine what needed to be done next. One of the new, and most noteworthy, goals that arose from this process was the desire to build an interpretive center at the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. Members of the steering committee expressed their belief that the educational opportunities at the sanctuary would be greatly enhanced by the presence of an interpretive center to augment the existing interpretive signs. While being careful not to build too much, project managers are attempting to strike an appropriate balance between celebrating the site as it is and constructing and integrating a built environment on the site.¹⁴⁰ The money for the interpretive center is coming from a request from the National Great River Park. The proposed expansion of the sanctuary to include an interpretive center reveals just how far the project has come in transforming the former industrial waste site into an educational site.

Urban parks are now serving even more functions than Olmsted could have ever imagined. In addition to providing an oasis from the city, as Olmsted originally hoped, urban parks now also involve community development, youth environmental stewardship, cultural resource interpretation and ecological restoration. Additionally, parks like Bruce Vento are bridging the supposed gap between city and nature by providing educational opportunities. Using urban park land and open space to actively educate individuals about urban open space issues and the relationship between cities and

¹⁴⁰ Marjorie Pitz. “Proposal for an Updated Community Vision. (Minneapolis: Martin & Pitz Associates, 1 February 2006.)

nature is an area with the potential for exponential growth. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and other projects like it are a step in the right direction towards ending what one expert has called the “alienation of urban society from environmental values and cultural connections with the land.”¹⁴¹ “Creating the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and trail system from an abandoned industrial site makes a powerful statement to our children about respecting and improving our Earth”¹⁴² and also makes a strong statement about the ability of concerned citizens to erode the dichotomy between cities and nature through the development of innovative urban open spaces.

¹⁴¹ Hough, *City Form and Natural Processes*, 1.

¹⁴² Martin & Pitz Associates, *A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek*, 7.

Conclusion

Throughout American history, urban parks have taken on many forms. The various manifestations, including the pleasure ground, the recreational facility, and the ecologically restored open space, have all been an attempt by humans to negotiate their relationship with the natural world, seek ways to make the urban experience more enjoyable, and ultimately to reconcile urban areas with nature. While each case study examines a different park, all the parks share some common features that reveal the dominant threads behind park development. For all their differences, all of the parks have manifested the dynamic relationship between humans and the natural world. Additionally, the history of the development of Loring Park, Lake Harriet, and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary proves that urban parks are not remnants of the natural world within the city, but rather are social creations reflecting the values of the people who create, maintain, and use them.

Furthermore, urban parks have always served as an instrument of democracy. The first urban parks, such as Loring Park, ensured that all people had access to nature, not simply the wealthy who could afford to go to their country houses on the weekend. Olmsted intended for the urban park to be a place where people from all different socioeconomic backgrounds could come together and socialize. This intention also came to fruition at Lake Harriet, where people from all levels of society gathered to listen to the music and play games on the shores of the lake. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary embodies the twenty-first century ideals of democracy as it was truly created by the people and for the people on every level. In creating urban parks, Americans have attempted to fully realize the ideals of a democratic society.

The practical importance of parks is also growing. People are realizing that urban parks provide not only a way for people to maintain a connection with the natural world in an urban setting, but also a way to provide countless other services that benefit the community and humanity as a whole. In addition to serving as a natural outlet for urban dwellers, parks also promote health and wellness by serving as a place for people to exercise. Additionally, parks stimulate community and economic development in the communities in which they are located by increasing property value and attracting additional business. Urban parks also provide invaluable ecological benefits including the mitigation of air pollution and unnecessary flooding. In addition to the economic and ecological benefits, urban parks also serve as a unique location for cultural and ecological education. All of these factors have led to a revitalized interest in our nation's urban parks.

The increased prominence of urban parks in recent scholarship as a rhetorical device for understanding the relationship between humans and the natural environment has recently been matched in the public sector by the passage of several policy initiatives that place urban parks at the forefront of legislative and public policy. In May of 2006, the issue of urban parks rose to national prominence with the Urban Park and Recreation Summit in Chicago. More than four hundred civic leaders and park advocates came together with the goal of establishing a National Agenda for Urban Parks and Recreation. The week-long summit generated a lot of support and excitement about the issue of urban parks. In June of 2006, at the end of the week long summit, the U.S. Conference of Mayors adopted a resolution that endorsed collaboration and a commitment to more

support and more funding for urban parks.¹⁴³ The effects of the endorsement of that resolution remain to be seen, but at least in a symbolic sense, urban parks have once again entered the spotlight in terms of urban planning. As humans continue to negotiate their relationship with the natural world, urban parks will continue to serve as social creations, reflecting a shared societal ideal of just what the function of an urban park should be.

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