



Formal entrance to Como Park, ca. 1905

Pleasure and Recreation for the People

PLANNING ST. PAUL



IMAGINE **ST. PAUL'S COMO PARK** at the turn of the twentieth century. Hoop-skirted ladies with wide hats and parasols stroll along the lake-front while horses and buggies wind along twisting drives through wooded groves planted in surprising variety. Oak trees provide a dense canopy over families of picnickers; the Aquarium, an artificial pond, affords visitors with views of rare tropical lilies; and the Banana Walk, a path lined with potted banana trees in the summer, delights strollers with the whimsical and unexpected. Thirty years later, by the end of the 1920s, Como Park is a changed landscape. The former Cozy Lake and part of Lake Como have been dammed and drained to make way for a new golf course (the latest craze), automobiles have replaced horses and bicycles on recently paved drives, and baseball diamonds and tennis courts occupy the energies of children and adults alike.

Andrew J. Schmidt

'S COMO PARK



The changes in Como Park provide an important physical record of evolving ideas about the design and function of city parks. During the early twentieth century, American landscape architects and planners came to view city parks as urban spaces for organized, active recreation rather than as areas to showcase naturalistic landscaping. The designs of two landscape architects who shaped Como Park and St. Paul's park system illustrate these two viewpoints. Horace William Shaler Cleveland, who drew up plans for Como during the late 1880s, intended the park to be a naturalistic, healthy refuge from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Longtime Superintendent of Parks Frederick Nussbaumer agreed but also felt that the park should offer its visitors amenities. Particularly after the turn of the century, he made organized recreation an important component of the park. By the end of the 1920s, the recreational ideal had overtaken the picturesque across the nation and at Como Park.¹



Horace W. S. Cleveland,
advocate for Como Park as a
naturalistic refuge from urban life

THE ORIGINS OF COMO PARK and the history of park-system development throughout the country are intertwined. As American cities grew increasingly congested in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, reformers such as the prolific writer Andrew Jackson Downing began advocating for the creation of public parks within urban areas. Citing the healthful, wholesome, and morally rejuvenating effects of nature, landscape architects began designing natural, picturesque parks in or near cities.

The first and best known example of these new public recreation areas was New York's Central Park

(1856–76), designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. The unifying theme of the new park was its contrast with the monotonous gridiron of the streets around it, achieved through curvilinear drives and walkways, naturalistic objects and vegetation to block out the urban scene, and plantings of sufficient variety as to provide new vistas at every turn. Perhaps the most striking innovation was the use of rolling carriageways and pedestrian paths separated by overpasses and underpasses. On the West Coast, San Francisco developed its equally famous Golden Gate Park during the 1870s. William Hammond Hall designed primarily naturalistic landscapes, though he added architectural shapes and contrasting features to provide a

warmth of feeling against the cool ocean breezes.²

Olmsted, Cleveland, and others would take the park concept one step further during the 1870s and 1880s by designing systems connected by roadways. Carefully landscaped to block out the urban setting, these systems were to consist of small city parks or squares, larger landscape parks located outside of congested city centers, and parkways to link them. Cleveland, a particularly strong proponent of park systems, argued eloquently that western cities, including St. Paul and Minneapolis, should set aside land for parks before development pressures made the costs prohibitive.³

Born in New England in 1814, Cleveland had traveled and farmed before establishing a landscape architecture practice with Robert Morris Copeland in 1854. Working on the East Coast, Cleveland came to know Frederick Law Olmsted, with whom he would have a lifelong correspondence. By 1869 Cleveland saw new opportunities as well as challenges in the Midwest and moved to Chicago. From his new office he designed parks, cemeteries, residential developments, and university campuses, and he extended his practice into Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. He lectured in both of the Twin Cities as early as 1872. After a series of personal setbacks in Chicago and with a growing amount of work in Minnesota, Cleveland moved to Minneapolis in 1886 at the age of

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72. His work there and in St. Paul would rank as his greatest professional triumph.⁴

Cleveland's park-system concept gained general public acceptance in the 1890s in tandem with the City Beautiful movement, a philosophy of city planning that emphasized order and harmony. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago had showcased classical ideals in most of its structures and in the careful placement of buildings and open space throughout the fairgrounds. By 1895 architect and city planner Daniel Burnham had begun work on the so-called Chicago Plan, which envisioned grand plazas, formal parterres, and triumphal gateways for the Windy City. He also produced classical, rational plans for Washington, D. C., Cleveland, and San Francisco. Of great importance for Chicago was a proposed series of ordered parks and open spaces along the lakefront. Like most American Beaux Arts adherents, Burnham sought to emulate

the grand boulevards of Baron Haussmann's plan for Paris and to impose classical order on narrow, haphazard city streets.⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth century, cities of all sizes followed the pattern of supplementing the old city-square parks with the more expansive and naturalistic landscape parks, connected by parkways. Among the larger cities, New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle all devised plans for linking systems of parks via drives and boulevards.⁶

MINNEAPOLIS AND ST. PAUL were no exceptions. While there had been little previous planning for open space, both of the Twin Cities began moving toward a system of parks during the 1880s. Although they did not yet see the congestion of the older eastern cities, leaders emulated the cultural institutions of the East at a time when parks were fashionable. And, if the

Picturesque Japanese Garden and Cozy Lake, later drained for the golf course, ca. 1905



PARK DEVELOPMENT IN THE TWIN CITIES

EARLY DEVELOPMENT of parks in St. Paul had been haphazard; the first city plat was surveyed in 1847, and no provision for public space was made. Small public squares, such as Rice and Irvine Parks, were mainly donated to the city. Like residents of other cities, St. Paulites became receptive to park principles by the 1870s. In 1873 the city purchased the land that would become Como Park. Following landscape architect Horace Cleveland's recommendations, St. Paul later acquired other areas for parks and parkways, such as Phalen Park in 1895 and Mississippi River Boulevard during the first decade of the twentieth century.*

Minneapolis followed a similar pattern, relying on donated public-square-type parks for open space until the early 1880s. It was slower than its twin to acquire larger tracts of land for parks. Not until the Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners was established in 1883 did the "City of Lakes" begin acquiring land around its lakes and other, larger tracts to reserve as parks. Minneapolis then took the local lead in park planning. In its first year, the park board acquired land for Central (Loring), Riverside, Logan, and Fairview Parks, apparently following the advice of its newly hired landscape architect, Cleveland, who had drawn up plans for a system. During the 1880s and 1890s, the board continued actively acquiring land, including in 1889 Minnehaha Park and a portion of Glenwood (Theodore Wirth) Park. In addition, the board acquired many miles of parkways, including Minnehaha.**

* Lloyd Peabody, "History of the Parks and Public Grounds of St. Paul," in *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul, 1915), 15: 610, 614–15; William H. Tishler and Virginia S. Luckhardt, "H. W. S. Cleveland: Pioneer Landscape Architect to the Upper Midwest," *Minnesota History* 49 (Fall 1985): 283–84.

** Theodore Wirth, *The Minneapolis Park System, 1883–1944* (Minneapolis: Board of Park Commissioners, 1945), 39–45, 62–74.

Twin Cities were not yet congested, some feared that they soon would be. During the 1880s St. Paul and Minneapolis witnessed boomtown-like growth in commercial, manufacturing, and residential construction. This economic expansion flooded local coffers, encouraging investment in the public realm. In addition to the available funds, city fathers were influenced, to no small degree, by Horace Cleveland's exhortations to acquire property for parks while land was relatively inexpensive. Furthermore, Cleveland's calls for Minneapolis and St. Paul to develop a system of connected parks and parkways inspired community leaders such as Charles M. Loring in Minneapolis and Joseph A. Wheelock in St. Paul. Each man became a leader of his city's movement to establish park systems.⁷

In developing large landscape parks or pleasure grounds, as they were known, St. Paul took an early lead over Minneapolis. During the 1880s and early 1890s, however, Minneapolis moved forward aggressively in establishing parks as well as a park system. By the turn of the century, St. Paul also had laid the foundations of its park system, and Como Park was the highlight.

In February 1872, Cleveland, while based in Chicago, addressed the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce concerning locations for parks, boulevards, squares, and other amenities. He suggested that the city set aside public park sites, including Summit Hill, the land around Como and Phalen Lakes, and the area along the Mississippi River gorge. Apparently acting on Cleveland's recommendations, St. Paul requested and received a bond issue of up to \$100,000 from the Minnesota Legislature in 1872 to acquire land for a major public park. The following year, a special commission purchased 257 acres on the north and west sides of Lake Como.⁸

Como Park was just within the St. Paul limits, as the city had recently annexed land west to Hamline Avenue and north to Lake Como and Phalen Street, now Arlington Avenue. (Land north of the lake was annexed later in 1885 and 1887.) Although developers had begun subdividing the area as early as 1857, the land remained largely undeveloped. Not until 1884, when Warrendale was platted as an exclusive suburban community on 52 acres south and west of the lake, were numbers of houses built.⁹

Despite some dispute over the wisdom of purchasing land for parks, particularly after the economic downturn that began in 1873, St. Paul retained the

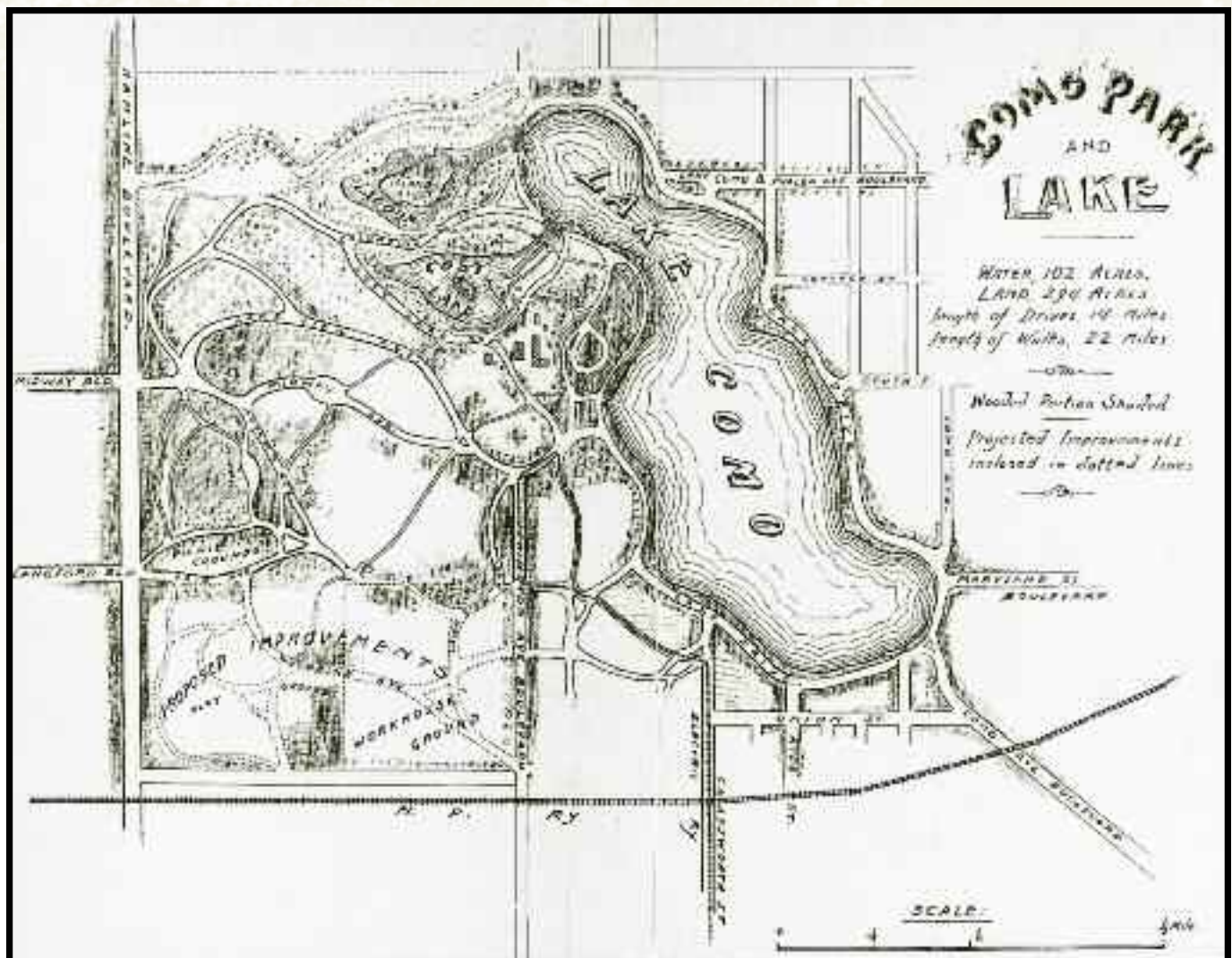
parcel near Lake Como. For the next 14 years, however, the city did little to develop Como Park. The land, an oak-savanna ecosystem with a naturally rolling surface covered with prairie grasses and groves, primarily of oak trees, was punctuated with bare, gravelly ridges and low, marshy areas. Access to the area improved, however, when the city approved construction of Como Avenue, replacing the old Como Road built by Henry McKenty in 1857.¹⁰

FORMATION OF THE ST. PAUL BOARD of Park Commissioners in 1887 finally provided the impetus for park development. As the city looked to its purchase

around Como Lake and sought additional park lands, the new commissioners retained Cleveland to prepare “such a design and plan for the improvement of Como Park as he may think best suited to its topography.” In July 1887 the commissioners authorized Cleveland to begin work on the park drives. The following summer, the board appointed John D. Estabrook to be the first superintendent of parks and Cleveland to be landscape architect. In addition to the road work, Cleveland now oversaw the initial land clearing, grading, and seeding.¹¹

It is clear from Cleveland’s writings that he subscribed to the theories of turn-of-the-century landscape

Early plan for Como Park, 1895



architects and city planners. In his 1885 plan for St. Paul, he argued, “The primary object [in creating parks] should be the preservation and development of . . . [natural] features in such manner as to show a just appreciation of their innate grandeur and beauty.” He pressed for the preservation of, among other areas, the rolling hills overlooking Como Lake. Not only would landscape parks provide a beautiful, natural respite from city life, they would have healthful effects as well, stimulating “recuperation of soul and body of the exhausting effects of the wear and tear of life in the crowded marts of commerce.” To this end, large parks should also provide for “passive recreation,” a term that included activities such as boating, ice skating, horseback riding, unstructured play, walking, and picnicking. Although he often framed his arguments for parks in economic terms, Cleveland was a lover of nature and rural life. Like other landscape architects during his era, his ideal was to show “the hand of man” as little as possible.¹²

Cleveland’s 1889 and 1890 designs for Como Park indicate his intention to make the park a naturalistic escape from city life. The only formal plantings, varied so as to relieve the monotony of the urban environment, were to be at the peripheries along the Lexington Parkway approach, Hamline Avenue, and Como Park Drive. Aside from the county workhouse, which had been placed in the southeastern corner of the park in 1881, only two buildings appear on the plan—one in the southwest corner and one atop a hill on the west side of the lake. The curvilinear roads and pathways, meant to provide refuge from the gridiron of city streets, follow the park’s natural contours, including the current Horton Avenue, Midway Parkway, and Estabrook Drive. Aside from the roads, however, the only part of Cleveland’s plan that was completed was the Hamline picnic grounds. In 1890 Cleveland oversaw the clearing of underbrush and the grading and seeding of the land with short grasses. The oaks that stand in the picnic grounds to this day are uniformly 110-to-115 years old; they must have been planted as part of Cleveland’s original landscaping. Mostly, though, Como Park’s first landscape architect concerned himself with planting a wide variety of trees, shrubs, and vines, especially along the drives.¹³

Victorian-style recreation on a wooded walkway, 1905





Cleveland's role as consulting landscape architect for St. Paul ended in about 1890. Superintendent Estabrook also had a short tenure, requesting a leave of absence for unspecified reasons in April 1891. In May the Board of Park Commissioners appointed Frederick Nussbaumer as superintendent. Serving for more than 30 years, Nussbaumer continued with some of Cleveland's ideas but took the park in new directions, as well.¹⁴



**German-born
Frederick Nussbaumer,
park superintendent, 1918**

A NATIVE OF BADEN, GERMANY, Frederick Nussbaumer trained in mechanical and civil engineering, botany, and landscape architecture at the University of Freiberg. He worked in London's Kew Gardens in the late 1860s as well as in Paris, where he is said to have met Horace Cleveland. Nussbaumer was in the French capital while Baron Haussmann was creating the first true urban park system and landscape architect Jean-Alphonse Alphand was designing the famous Bois de Boulogne park. An important feature of Alphand's park that no doubt influenced Nussbaumer's designs for Como was the flower gardens, which were designed to provide "a melody of forms and colours [that would] smooth the junction of grass and shrubs."¹⁵

Nussbaumer emigrated to the United States in 1876 and settled in St. Paul two years later. When work on Como Park began in 1887, he was hired as a gardener. After filling the remainder of Estabrook's term in 1891, Nussbaumer was reappointed every year until his retirement in 1922.¹⁶

Superintendent Nussbaumer followed Cleveland's general plans for Como Park yet developed many of its individual features. As evidenced by his writings, Nussbaumer, too, subscribed to the ideals of Victorian landscape architecture. He described Lake Como as an ideal place for a park, "reposing in the midst of undulating landscapes, with all that variety of surface forms . . . which are the most effective elements of artistic park culture." Displays should be subordinate to the "predominating landscape effects" and serve to "emphasize the beauty of natural landscape." Nussbaumer tempered his idealism, however, with the understand-

ing that city residents pay for their parks; in return, they should be offered recreational facilities and attractive horticultural displays. Como Park embraced "rural features of exceptional natural beauty and especial fitness for the recreative and social uses of parks."¹⁷

Nussbaumer soon made noticeable improvements at Como Park. He continued with Cleveland's 1890 landscaping plan, and by 1895, there were 195 acres of lawn and grassland cultivated and 2,840 trees and 3,670 shrubs newly planted. In that year the park covered 396 acres, 160 of them wooded and 102 water, including Lake Como and the since-drained Cozy Lake. With \$25,000 in bonds issued in 1891, Nussbaumer oversaw completion of Cleveland's design for Como Lake Drive during 1892–93. The new



superintendent also expanded the system of roads laid out by Cleveland, adding the current Kaufman and Nussbaumer Drives and a road around Cozy Lake. By 1895 the park featured 14.5 miles of drives and 22 miles of walkways. Vegetation lining the roads provided varied scenery and cut down the sight lines, giving the drives the desired rural qualities.¹⁸

The floral display area, which Nussbaumer developed in the mid-1890s, is an early example of his efforts to provide a variety of park landscapes for a diverse public. Known as “flower hill” or the “floral parterre,” the area lay southeast of the spot where the Conservatory now stands and included circular walks through tropical plantings and a pond, known as the Aquarium. This pond, which predates the current one immediately south of the Conservatory, contained flowers and tropical plants, such as water lilies and hyacinths, that were first cultivated in greenhouses to the west of the pool and then in the Conservatory, after its construction in 1915. The Aquarium was a popular attraction; by 1896, Nussbaumer listed it as “a favorite

with the public.” It was originally crossed by a wooden bridge, which was replaced in 1903 by the current fieldstone-and-mortar bridge.¹⁹

In addition to the floral display, the old Banana Walk illustrates Nussbaumer’s experimentation with the exotic. Located at the base of a hill that Lexington Parkway currently winds around, it was lined with palm trees during the summer. Like the lilies, the palms spent winters in park greenhouses. Several topiary features also appeared in 1894–95, including the original Gates Ajar (located southeast of its current position), an elephant, and a globe. These whimsical shapes were built with wood frames and wire mesh containing soil planted with a variety of flowers. After temporarily residing at a second location near the Conservatory, the Gates Ajar would be moved to its current site in 1951 and rebuilt to approximately four times its original size.²⁰

Another new park attraction proved equally enduring. Established in 1897, the Como Park Zoo initially

Women walking to popular Lake Como, 1895





Strollers pausing on the new fieldstone-and-mortar bridge to appreciate the lily pond, ca. 1904

consisted of a large free-range pen for animals native to the region such as elk, deer, and bison. Begun in response to unsolicited donations of animals, the unplanned zoo nevertheless fit the naturalistic ideal for the park.²¹

ALTHOUGH THE TRANSITION away from strictly naturalistic landscaping in Como Park had begun by the turn of the century, it was by no means complete. Large tracts in the northern and southern portions of the park remained forested, crisscrossed by scenic drives. In addition, plant lists in annual reports show that Nussbaumer continued to landscape with species native to the region, including elm, box elder, and lilac.

As he landscaped, Nussbaumer created a variety of scenic vistas. While he left no written record of his intentions, park photographs from the early twentieth

century depict a number of these views. Some of the vistas were broad and open, such as the area northeast of the Conservatory overlooking Cozy Lake, the area atop the east picnic hill, and the view of the lakeside pavilion from the east. Others were shorter and focused on designed features, using trees as a backdrop. Such vistas included the view southeast from the Conservatory, overlooking the lily pond and “flower hill.” Some areas had primarily functional landscaping. For instance, the Hamline picnic grounds featured a cultivated lawn and a grove of oak trees providing a canopy overhead. The “great meadow” to the east was an open field used for informal, active recreation.

While the floral display and other areas with scenic vistas were popular for strolling, relaxing, and generally escaping from the city, the park also offered activities including band concerts and picnicking. Como Lake

was a main draw for park visitors at the turn of the century, the nexus for recreation. Rowboats plied the lake's waters during the summer, and ice skaters skimmed its surface during the winter. Along its shore were paths for strollers and drives for carriages.²²

As early as the mid-1890s, bands played regularly along the lakefront during the summer. In 1905 a new pavilion with a bandstand extending on piers into the lake replaced one that had been built 10 years earlier. With its arches and columns and shiny white surfaces, this pavilion must have given the impression that a bit

Park worker Henry Robbins with his framework for Gates Ajar, ca. 1915, and the topiary as it appeared in 1934







of the Chicago World's Fair had come to St. Paul. The second pavilion lasted a good deal longer than the first—87 years, until 1992 when the city rebuilt it according to the original blueprints, though it no longer extends into the lake.²³

Picnicking at Como Park was as popular at the turn of the century as it is today. In 1902 a pavilion was added to the Hamline picnic grounds in order to accommodate “the large multitude of picnic parties who like to gather in this woodland grove.” Another small but popular picnic area on the hill overlooked the lake.²⁴

In keeping with the view that parks were for all of the public, Nussbaumer and the park commission worked to improve access. The St. Paul City Railway, which had first reached Como in 1892, was allowed to construct a line through the park by 1905; in return for the privilege, the company built the Lexington Parkway bridge, a footbridge over the tracks, and the new lakeside pavilion. The city also built a streetcar station (now the park office) in 1905, replacing an earlier open-sided building, and planted the area with “an old fashioned flower, or colonial garden.” Thus, Como was connected to the Twin Cities streetcar system as well as to a direct line between the park and Lake Harriet in Minneapolis.²⁵

Nussbaumer continued moving away from strictly naturalistic designs in the early twentieth century. A second wave of improvements in the floral display area during the 1910s culminated in the construction of the Conservatory in 1915. First, another lily pond, now known as the Frog Pond and located immediately south of the Conservatory, was built in 1910. That same year, workers also completed the Rockery in the area immediately surrounding the pond. Originally, this rock garden included a grotto built of rough-cut stone. Water flowed through a concrete trough from the grotto to the lily pond, which extended farther to the northwest than it does today. Next, urged by Nussbaumer, the park board approved construction of the Conservatory, the large greenhouse complex that has provided visitors with a tropical refuge from Minnesota winters for more than 85 years. Typical of many late-nineteenth-century conservatories and exhibition halls, Como Conservatory was most directly influenced by the

Popular summer band concert at lake, ca. 1904

Palm House in London's Kew Gardens. The Conservatory, a highlight of the park since it opened, has undergone periodic renovation since 1984.²⁶

A **NOTHER IDEAL THAT INFLUENCED** Nussbaumer and affected the development of Como Park was the playground, or recreation, movement. In the early 1900s, Progressive Era reformers advocated government intervention to fix the problems that emerged as society transformed from primarily rural and agrarian to urban and industrial. Designers and planners decided that parks should provide organized activities for the urban working class, and so the park itself became a vehicle for reform. As early as 1889, Boston city officials, following the lead of private charitable organizations, had begun to provide playgrounds and other recreational facilities for residents. That city's Charlesbank Playground was equipped with play apparatus, pools, and a running track. New York and

Chicago soon followed suit, and by 1900 dozens of cities had created small playground parks and began adding recreational areas to larger parks.²⁷

Child welfare was a passion of Progressive reformers, who argued that providing opportunities for wholesome, outdoor activities was a health issue. For example, St. Paul's Commissioner of Health, Dr. Justus Ohage, established Harriet Island Park, complete with playground and public baths (swimming) on the Mississippi River in 1899 because "cleanliness and healthy outdoor exercise" were "absolutely necessary to the maintenance of good public health." Like other cities, St. Paul soon began establishing playgrounds, as well. Residents approved a charter amendment empowering the City Council to appropriate \$10,000 per year for playgrounds in 1904. To oversee the new funding, the council formed a playground committee within the park board. In five years, six new city playgrounds had been created.²⁸

H. M. Barnett Park Band, posed near a streetcar on the rail line that connected Como Park to St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Lake Harriet, 1906





Greenhouse workers with plants raised for the park's floral displays, ca. 1920, and the Conservatory, ca. 1925 (now on the National Register of Historic Places)

Park planners, too, came to realize that their open spaces should provide a range of activities for children and adults. According to longtime Superintendent of Minneapolis Parks Theodore Wirth, it was fine for parks to be used for drives, walks, and relaxation, but there should also be opportunities for active recreation, especially for children.²⁹

On the St. Paul side of the Mississippi River, Nussbaumer was actively concerned with providing recreational facilities to complement picturesque landscaping. By the time the 1904 charter amendment passed, he had been studying playgrounds for several years and soon devised a plan for an 11-acre playground area in the northeast section of Como Park in what is now the golf course. The plan shows a ball field, tennis courts, men's and women's "open air gymnasiums" for calisthenics, a swimming pool, a children's wading pool, and a field house. Although Nussbaumer felt that "the expenditure of public funds could be made to no more beneficial purpose" than the Como Park playground, it is unclear how much work was completed beyond grading and filling the land.³⁰

Despite inaction on the formal playground, several areas in the park were developed for active recreation during the 1910s. Baseball fields were created on the northwest end of the picnic grounds, and tennis courts were set up on a field south of the Conservatory. The city added more baseball diamonds and tennis courts in 1914 to accommodate increased demand. That year Nussbaumer reported, "Como Park is the favorite pleasure and recreation ground of the people." This shift to the recreational was a trend that would continue during the 1920s. In response, administration was reorganized in the mid-1910s, and the Bureau of Parks became part of a new department: Parks, Playgrounds, and Public Buildings.³¹

WHEN NUSSBAUMER RETIRED in 1922, Como Park had reached a level of maturity. Its layout was completed, and it had many fine amenities. Although Nussbaumer had designed recreational areas, large parts of the park remained naturalistic. Como would soon undergo some significant alterations, however, once again reflecting its changing uses. During the

1920s, a growing fleet of cars and trucks took the place of horsepower and largely diminished ridership on the streetcar lines. With more mobility, St. Paulites no longer depended solely on city parks as an escape from urban life; they could simply drive to the country. By the end of the decade, the superintendent and commissioners began to make major alterations to Como Park and no longer sought to balance the recreational with the naturalistic.

Following the retirement of Nussbaumer and two short-tenured superintendents, George L. Nason was appointed in 1924 new head of the Parks Bureau. Nason focused much of the bureau's energy on paving parkways, including many in Como Park. With the decline in streetcar ridership, the streetcar station was converted into offices in 1926, and the waiting station across the tracks was removed. The northern portion of Lake Como was filled and dammed off in 1923–25, giving the lake its current, more constricted meander line.³²

Throughout the city, park planning now emphasized facilities that encouraged active, organized recreation. No fewer than 30 new playgrounds or athletic fields were acquired or established from 1923 to 1929. In the northeast corner of Como Park, work included regrading fields and adding new playground equipment.³³

The major development that tipped the balance in Como toward recreation, however, was the golf course. Established at the end of the 1920s in the northern portion of the park (formerly Cozy Lake), the course's first nine holes were completed in 1930. Although the golf course complemented the idea of the park as a green space, it dedicated a large portion to active recreation and made no attempt to mirror natural landscapes.

The expansion of Como Park Zoo after 1930 further bolstered the park's recreational role. Monkey Island (1935; since rebuilt), the Zoological Building, the Hoofed Stock Barn, and the bear dens joined the old animal pens where elk, deer, and bison roamed. With this construction, much of it accomplished through the federal Works Progress Administration, the zoo gained a more dominant role in the park, moving it further away from the nineteenth-century naturalistic ideal. Development of recreation-oriented facilities in Como Park continued after World War II when amusement rides were set up near the zoo, giving that area a carnival feel. Other postwar additions included new zoo buildings, the swimming pool and tennis courts south of Horton Avenue, the Hamms Waterfall, and the McKnight Formal Gardens.³⁴

COMO PARK TODAY

MORE THAN A CENTURY after Horace Cleveland first drew the plans, Como Park still reigns as one of the most popular regional parks in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. In 2000 more than 2.6 million people of all ages and many nationalities flocked there in all seasons to visit attractions both old and new. The lake remains a focal point for activity, with almost two miles of perimeter paths for walking, cycling, running, or skating. Fisherfolk angle for bass, walleye, and muskies. Small boats, canoes, and rental paddleboats ply the lake's waters in summer, while ice skaters skim its surface in winter. The lake-side pavilion offers plays and a "Music in the Parks" series in summer, as well as a year-round restaurant-coffee shop and public programs.

Flower lovers still enjoy the exotic plants in the warm, moist Como Conservatory, a National Register

site open seven days a week all year. The nearby Ordway Japanese Garden is open from May through the end of summer. And the Gates Ajar remains a perennial favorite backdrop for family and wedding photos.

Visitors seeking more active recreation can swim in Como pool, play 18 holes of golf, ski and snowboard on the golf course (or rent equipment and take lessons), and join the municipal athletics events held on McMurray Field. Como Zoo, miniature golf, amusement rides, and Cafesjian's Carousel, built in 1914 and long a beloved feature at the Minnesota State Fair, are favorite family destinations. The park also boasts two picnic shelters, three fire rings, and numerous less formal but well-used spots for picnicking. The Historic Streetcar Station, built in 1905, stands at the south entrance to the park. It now houses a museum about the Twin Cities Streetcar Line and Como Park.



Cold-weather activities at Como Park included a Winter Carnival Dog Derby in front of the lakeside pavilion, ca. 1925.

LANDSCAPES ARE DYNAMIC, as Como Park's development illustrates. From Cleveland's naturalistic plans of the nineteenth century to Nussbaumer's combination of the pastoral and recreational in the early twentieth century, and, finally, to the shift toward the recreational model by the 1930s, Como's appearance has changed along with perceptions of what an ideal public park should be. While the park has evolved, some of Cleveland's and many of Nussbaumer's designed

landscapes are essentially intact. Como Park's historic landscapes are an important link to the past of St. Paul and to the memories of the thousands of people throughout the region who visited the park over the past century. Recognizing the importance of preserving Como Park while planning for the future, the City of St. Paul's Division of Parks and Recreation has an active program for maintaining or rehabilitating Como Park's historic features and landscapes.³⁵ □

NOTES

1. This article stems from a documentation project undertaken as part of ongoing planning efforts for Como Park: Andrew J. Schmidt, *The City Itself a Work of Art: A Historical Evaluation of Como Park*, prepared by The 106 Group Ltd. for the St. Paul Division of Parks and Recreation, 1996. The author especially thanks the Division of Parks and Recreation, which sponsored the study and provided key technical support, the 106 Group Ltd., with which he worked for many years, and staff members at the Minnesota Historical Society, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Ramsey County Historical Society.

2. Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 283–87; Bruce Radde, *The Merritt Parkway* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 10; Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 33–34.

3. H. W. S. Cleveland, *Public Parks, Radial Avenues and Boulevards: Outline Plan for a Park System for the City of St. Paul* (St. Paul: Globe Job Office, 1885), 23–24; H. W. S. Cleveland, *The Aesthetic Development of the United Cities of Minneapolis and St.*

Paul (Minneapolis: A. C. Bausman, 1888), 12–18; William H. Tishler and Virginia S. Luckhardt, "H. W. S. Cleveland: Pioneer Landscape Architect to the Upper Midwest," *Minnesota History* 49 (Fall 1985): 281–91.

4. In addition to laying out Como Park, Cleveland made recommendations for the entire park systems of Minneapolis and St. Paul and designed, among other properties, Oakland and Lakeland Cemeteries, the St. Anthony Park subdivision, and the portion of the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus known as the Campus Knoll near University Avenue and Pleasant Street. Newton, *Design on the Land*, 308–17; Tishler and Luckhardt, "H. W. S. Cleveland," 281–91; *St. Paul Dispatch*, Oct. 15, 1948, p. 33; Lance M. Neckar, "Landscape Architecture and Campus Design," in *The University of Minnesota Preservation Plan* (St. Paul: Landscape Research, 1998), 103–05.

5. Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); David Lowe, *Lost Chicago* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

6. Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 31–32.

7. Benson K. Whitney, "Parks and Principles: Ideas in the

Movement for Urban Parks in Minneapolis, 1857–1883,” unpublished thesis, 1982, p. 10–15, copy in Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) Library, St. Paul; Theodore Wirth, *The Minneapolis Park System, 1883–1944* (Minneapolis: Board of Park Commissioners, 1945), 16–19.

8. The commission consisted of Henry H. Sibley, Joseph A. Wheelock, Samuel Calhoun, William Pitt Murray, and J. C. Burbank. Lloyd Peabody, “History of the Parks and Public Grounds of St. Paul,” in *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul, 1915), 15: 614–15; Tishler and Luckhardt, “H. W. S. Cleveland,” 283–84.

9. The majority of houses around Como Park were built during the 1910s and 1920s; in some pockets, the residences date to the early post-World War II era. Patricia A. Murphy and Susan W. Granger, “Historic Sites Survey of St. Paul and Ramsey County, 1980–1983, Final Report,” unpublished manuscript prepared for the Ramsey County Historical Society and the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, 1983, p. 415, copy in MHS Library. The estimate of housing construction dates is based on the author’s visual inspection.

10. St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1891*, 235–37; *1892*, 13–14.

11. The city had established a standing committee for parks as early as 1878. *St. Paul City Directory, 1878–9*; St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners, Minutes, June 4, July 2, 1887, June 30, Aug. 27, 1888, Como Park office.

12. Cleveland, *Outline Plan*, 4; Cleveland, *Aesthetic Development*, 10.

13. H. W. S. Cleveland, *Como Park and Lake Como*, unpublished map, 1889, Division of Parks and Recreation, St. Paul, and *Como Park, City of St. Paul, Minnesota*, unpublished map, 1890, Department of Public Works, Records and Mapping Office, St. Paul; Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1891*, 235–39.

14. Park Commissioners, Minutes, Apr. 30, May 7, 1891.

15. Henry A. Castle, *History of St. Paul and Vicinity* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), 2: 710; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Oct. 22, 1935, p. 1; George F. Chadwick, *The Park and the Town: Public Landscape in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 154–55.

16. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1891*, 37; *Pioneer Press*, Oct. 22, 1935, p. 1.

17. Frederick Nussbaumer, “An Ideal Public Park,” *Minnesota Horticulturalist* 30 (Mar. 1902): 113–14; Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1895*, 1, 10; Nussbaumer, “Correspondence Between Superintendent of Parks and Board of Park Commissioners,” unpublished document, ca. 1905, Como Park office.

18. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1895*, 11–13.

19. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1897*, 19, *1903*, 55.

20. Park Commissioners, Minutes, May 1, 1905; *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 28, 1951, p. 5; Jennifer Knutson, “Making

History—Como Park Conservatory,” n. p., pamphlet, ca. 1995, copy in MHS Library.

21. Margaret Manship, “Father Begged Feed for His Animals,” *Ramsey County History* 27 (Summer 1992): 16; Ann Kelley and Paul Olsen, *City of St. Paul: Como Park, A Romance, 1873–1973* (St. Paul: Como Park Docents, 1973[?]), 13.

22. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1895*, 18; *1896*, 7; *1902*, 25.

23. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1895*, 18–19; *1902*, 8; *1905*, 20–21; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 29, 1993, p. 1C.

24. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1902*, 19.

25. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1905*, 10–13, 43.

26. The Rockery included the ledge on which the Excedra was built in 1929. This nook, overlooking the pond and framed by a small pergola, was intended as a place for quiet reflection or conversation. The grotto and a portion of the Frog Pond were buried in 1915 during construction of the Conservatory. The 106 Group Ltd., “Archaeological Excavation and Data Recovery of the Frog Pond Grotto at Como Park, St. Paul, Minnesota,” unpublished manuscript, 1997, prepared for the St. Paul Division of Parks and Recreation; Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1919*, 3; Patricia A. Murphy and Gary Phelps, “St. Paul’s Crystal Palace,” *Mpls/St. Paul*, Apr. 1984, p. 135–37; Audrey Clasemann, “St. Paul’s Como Park: Its History, Its Charm,” Appendix B, “Memorials,” unpublished paper, Dec. 18, 1992, copy in MHS Library.

27. Newton, *Design on the Land*, 622–23; Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 61–65. Emphasizing the focus of this period, Cranz uses the term “reform park.”

28. St. Paul Department of Health, *Annual Report, 1900*, 6; Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1905*, 19, *1910*, 99. Carl Rothfuss of the St. Paul YMCA was named supervisor of playgrounds. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1907*, 80.

29. Wirth, *Minneapolis Park System*, 67.

30. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1905*, 19; *1911*, 28; *1919*, 21.

31. St. Paul Department of Parks, Playgrounds and Public Buildings, *Report for 1914–1919*, 3.

32. Preceding Nason were Earl L. Finney (1922–23) and William T. March (1923–24). Nason oversaw the St. Paul park system until he went to work for the National Park Service in 1932. Arthur R. Nichols, “George Lister Nason,” *Landscape Architecture* 40 (Apr. 1950): 128–29; St. Paul Parks, *Report for 1922–1929*, 16–19.

33. Here and below, St. Paul Parks, *Report for 1922–1929*, 40–42.

34. Park Commissioners, *Annual Report, 1943*; Murphy and Granger, “Historic Sites Survey,” 104–06; Manship, “Father Begged Feed,” 17.

35. Don Ganje, *Design Guidelines for the Treatment of Como Park’s Historic Landscapes* (St. Paul: Division of Parks and Recreation, 1997).

All images are in the MHS collections, including Cleveland’s portrait, from Edmund J. Cleveland, The Genealogy of the Cleveland and Cleaveland Families, vol. 1 (Hartford, CN: 1899), and the map, from St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners, Annual Report for 1895, both in MHS Library.



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