



History of the Grand Rounds

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With the development of milling on St. Anthony Falls, the growing city of Minneapolis quickly urbanized in the middle of the 19th century. By the 1880s, immense population growth fueled speculation about the potential overdevelopment of the land. As a result, advocates began promoting land conservation and protection to both preserve the city's natural character and to bolster the identity of Minneapolis as a developing metropolitan area.

A dedicated group of citizens was needed to oversee this vast project. In the spring of 1883, voters authorized a referendum to create a Board of Park Commissioners independent from the city government. One of the board's first actions was to retain landscape architect Horace William Shaler Cleveland to produce a master plan for a park system. Cleveland was one of America's pioneers in landscape architecture.

Cleveland's Vision for the Twin Cities

Cleveland first began promoting a plan for an ambitious park system encompassing both Minneapolis and Saint Paul in February 1872, when he appeared in a lecture series in the Twin Cities. Two months later, Saint Paul hired him to outline a comprehensive park system for the city. Although a national economic depression in 1873 thwarted his ambitious plans, some elements were later developed including Phalen Park, Como Park, and boulevards connecting the two cities and edging the Mississippi.¹

Eleven years passed before the Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners was founded and Cleveland presented his ideas for a comprehensive park and parkway system. In the meantime, however, he maintained contact with Minneapolis leaders, addressing the City Improvement Association in 1878. In 1882 he was retained to prepare a plan for Franklin Steele Square. This was apparently at the request of Charles Loring, who administered funds provided by Steele's descendants for improvements to the square. Loring described the plan, which "can be carried out at a comparatively limited expenditure," as "handsome."²

Creating a comprehensive park system was a much more substantial undertaking. When making the case for this investment, Cleveland emphasized the economic benefits of park development to gain the attention of business-minded board members. He noted the increased value of land around New York's decade-old Central Park and in Washington, D.C., where new boulevards and parks were attracting residents to the city. He also observed that the initial outlay for park development need not be onerous, particularly when compared to the cost of buying inflated or improved property at a later date. "Look forward for a century," he urged, "to the time when the city has a population of a million, and think what

¹ Lance M. Neckar, "Fast-tracking Culture and Landscape: Horace William Shaler Cleveland and the Gardens in the Midwest," in *Regional Garden Design in the United States*, ed. Therese O'Malley and Marc Treib (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 83-85.

² Folwell credits Loring for the board's retention of Cleveland as landscape architect for the park system; Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 4:429n. Other references include "An Interesting and Instructive Address on the Subject by Mr. H. W. Cleveland of Chicago Before the City Improvement Association," n.p., [1878], and "The Franklin Steele Square," n.p., [1882], both newspaper clippings in scrapbooks, vol. 1, page 4, Charles M. Loring Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul (hereafter cited as Loring scrapbooks).

will be their wants. They will have wealth enough to purchase all that money can buy, but all their wealth cannot purchase a lost opportunity, or restore natural features of grandeur and beauty, which would then possess priceless value, and which you can preserve for them if you will but say the word and save them from the destruction which certainly awaits them if you fail to utter it.” Cleveland stressed that a comprehensive plan for developing the land should be prepared at the outset, but could be implemented in phases.³

The concept of The Grand Rounds was born from Cleveland’s “preference of an extended system of boulevards, or ornamental avenues, rather than a series of detached open areas or public squares.” This was not only an aesthetic consideration: Cleveland had lost many possessions in the 1871 Chicago fire, and saw parkways as an effective firebreak in built-up urban areas. In addition, Cleveland stressed the sanitary benefits derived from parkways. Cholera, typhus, and other diseases plagued cities in the late nineteenth century. Parkway could save land from unhealthy uses and, reflecting the Victorians’ great love for ventilation, carry “winds . . . to the heart of the city, purified by their passage over a long stretch of living water, and through the foliage of miles of forest.”⁴

Minneapolis was fortunate to be endowed with natural amenities that were ideally suited for a series of parkways. Cleveland identified some components of what was eventually to become the Grand Rounds, although his vision, bold for its time, now seems modest. This reflected, in part, the smaller boundaries of Minneapolis at that time. Cleveland urged the park board to establish parkways on each side of the Mississippi River gorge, a “priceless . . . jewel,” and to acquire the land between the parkways and the river for public enjoyment. On the east side of the river, the parkway’s north end would terminate at the University of Minnesota campus. To the south, the parkway would provide access to Bridal Veil Falls and, at the city’s border, link up with a complementary roadway in Saint Paul. On the river’s west side, the parkway would begin south of downtown Minneapolis, then continue until it reached a proposed park at Minnehaha Falls. Cleveland hoped that the parkway could ultimately extend beyond the city limits to Fort Snelling and the Mississippi’s juncture with the Minnesota River.⁵

Cleveland characterized south Minneapolis between the Mississippi, Lake Harriet, and Lake Calhoun as “nearly dead level, offering no natural features of interest.” To attract high-class commercial and residential development to this area, he recommended that Lake Street between the river and Lake Calhoun be improved as an “ornamental avenue” at least two hundred feet wide. Cleveland later urged that Thirty-fourth Street be similarly developed to provide a direct connection, with the construction of a new bridge, to Saint Paul’s Summit Avenue.⁶

A parkway extending from the western end of Lake Street would wrap around the north, west, and south sides of Lake Calhoun, then along Thirty-sixth Street, the northern border of Lakewood Cemetery, to Hennepin Avenue. This section of Thirty-sixth Street, as well as the entire length of Hennepin to its intersection with Lyndale Avenue near downtown Minneapolis, would become parkways. The board had already determined that a parkway would encircle Lake Harriet.⁷

³ Theodore C. Blegen, *Horace William Shaler Cleveland: Pioneer American Landscape Architect* (Minneapolis: published for the St. Anthony Park Area Historical Association by H. N. Bruce Printing Company, n.d.), n.p.; Horace W. S. Cleveland, *Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkway for the City of Minneapolis*, read at a meeting of the Minneapolis Park Commissioners, June 2, 1883 (Minneapolis: Johnson, Smith and Harrison, 1883), 3-4, 6; MPRB, *Eighth Annual Report, 1890*, 22.

⁴ Cleveland, *Suggestions*, 6, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9; Cleveland, *Aesthetic Development*, 16, map appended.

⁷ Cleveland, *Suggestions*, 9-10.

Lyndale Avenue, a north-south boulevard to complement Lake Street's east-west axis, would extend into north Minneapolis to Twenty-sixth Avenue North, where Cleveland recommended a park be developed. The parkway would then turn east, following Twenty-sixth Avenue to the Mississippi and Ferry Street (Eighteenth Avenue N.E.) from the river to the city's east boundary. The parkway would continue south along the border to reach the university campus, making the loop with the Mississippi River parkway. The route extended about twenty miles around the city's core. "I would have the City itself a work of art," Cleveland explained.⁸

The board, which had inherited only six acres of parkland from the city council, immediately began to implement Cleveland's plan. Within a year it had acquired thirty acres near downtown for Central (later Loring) Park and twenty acres on the west bank of the Mississippi for Riverside Park. It had also begun negotiating for land along both banks of the Mississippi. In 1885, James Stinson donated a strip of land two hundred feet wide and a mile long for a boulevard; the site was graded, planted, and named after its benefactor in 1892, making it northeast Minneapolis's first parkway. Also by 1885, the park board had acquired and widened Hennepin Avenue, designating it a boulevard. A similar treatment was given to Lyndale Avenue North between Glenwood and Twenty-ninth Avenue North in the following year.⁹

At the same time, parkway development was proceeding along Lake Harriet, Lake Calhoun, and Lake of the Isles. The systematic approach advocated by Cleveland was exemplified by proposed connections between Lake of the Isles and parks to the north and south of it. By 1888, grading was underway on part of Kenwood Parkway, which would link the lake to Central Park. Reaching Lake Calhoun was more problematic, however, because railroad tracks bisected the route. Joseph Dean and others had donated some land for this link in 1887, and additional property was purchased from his estate in 1892. It was not until 1896, however, that the railroad grade crossing was removed by construction of a viaduct. Plans to create a navigable waterway along what is now Dean Parkway were never carried to fruition. The link between Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet was established in 1890 when the board bought a 24-acre parcel for Interlachen (now William Berry) Park.¹⁰

Another noteworthy acquisition during this period was a 173-acre parcel that contained Minnehaha Falls. Longfellow's publication of the "Song of Hiawatha" in 1855 drew national attention to the falls. An effort to create a park owned jointly by Minneapolis and Saint Paul was rejected by the latter city in 1875. A decade later, the legislature authorized the creation of Minnesota's first state park at this location, but politics and lawsuits by unhappy property owners ultimately foiled the plan. Finally, the Minneapolis Park Board stepped in and purchased the site, which is still officially known as "Minnehaha State Park."¹¹

The park board's early accomplishments were catalyzed by its first president, Charles Loring, who had long been a crusader for parks. In 1864, only four years after arriving in Minneapolis, he convinced a property owner to donate to the city a small duck pond near Hennepin Avenue's intersection with the Mississippi. This was the first parcel in what was to become Gateway Park. Murphy Square had been given to the city in 1857, "but this remained a vacant tract, used only as a cow pasture or public common until 1880," Loring reported. In that year "the City Council passed an ordinance creating the office of City Forester, who, under the supervision of this writer, laid out walks and planted this park with trees."¹²

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11; MBPC, *Eighth Annual Report, 1890*, cover.

⁹ Jurisdiction over Stinson Boulevard was transferred from the park board to the city of Minneapolis in 1962; see MBPC, *Eighth Annual Report, 1962*, 7. For other references, see Wirth, 39.

¹⁰ Folwell et al. report in MBPC, *Eighth Annual Report, 1890*, 24; Wirth, 39, 63, 91, 107, 122, 150, 157.

¹¹ Roy W. Meyer, *Everyone's Country Estate: A History of Minnesota's State Parks* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991), 1-2; Wirth, 49-51.

¹² Charles M. Loring, "History of the Parks and Public Grounds of Minneapolis," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* 15 (May 1915): 599-600.

Loring wanted to fill the prairie city with trees, and “due to his untiring leadership, Minneapolis has become one of the most uniformly tree-adorned cities of the country,” according to William Folwell. The elegant elms that graced Minneapolis streets until the arrival of Dutch elm disease may have been the product of Loring’s visit to New York’s Central Park in 1888. There the trees “have grown so as to form arches over the walks and roads,” he wrote in his diary; “The sight of these trees encourage[s] me to fresh action in our city where our own citizens, especially the poor, can walk in the shade of fine trees without having to pay for the privilege of seeing a piece of natural woods.”¹³

Loring served as park board president through 1891 and again in 1893. He completed his final service as a commissioner from 1904 to 1907, but remained active in park matters until his death in 1922. The *Dictionary of American Biography* notes that “whether or not on the board, he labored incessantly for, and gave freely of his own means to, the cause.” The publication describes Loring as a “national figure in civic betterment work.” He delighted in both the master planning and the minutia of park development. His interests are revealed in scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, which he augmented with excerpts from his diary. An example from June 2, 1885 notes that he “went with Mr. Cleveland and Mr. Berry to look over the proposed boulevard around Lake Harriet.” He clearly understood the implications of the project: “Long after my name has been forgotten the generations to come will thank God that this beautiful lake with its wooded banks was preserved for their use.” It was not until October 1888 that he was finally able to report: “Today the deeds of the Lake Harriet property were recorded and the city now is owner in fact of the beautiful lake and all the shore rights. I have spent much time during the past three years in bringing about this result.”¹⁴

Loring worked closely with William Morse Berry, who had been hired as the park board’s first full-time superintendent in 1885. Cleveland had met Berry in Chicago when implementing Olmsted’s plans for the South Park System, which Berry managed for ten years. A native of Maine with experience as a ship’s captain, Berry was to devote twenty years of his life to park development and maintenance in Minneapolis. According to William Folwell: “Fully sympathizing with the views and tastes of Mr. Cleveland, Mr. Berry rapidly produced admirable results at very moderate cost to this city.” In 1916, ten years after his retirement, Interlachen Park between Lakes Harriet and Calhoun was renamed in his honor.¹⁵

Cleveland praised the work of Loring and Berry in 1890, less than a decade after the park board had been established: “No city was ever better adapted by nature to be made a gem of beauty and none was ever better equipped for the performance of such work, with such men as C. M. Loring at the head of the Park Commission, and W. M. Berry as Superintendent of whose capacity as a constructor our present parks afford abundant evidence, and whose economy and intelligent administration are so well known to our citizens as to need no testimony from me.”¹⁶

The Vision Enlarged

¹³ C. M. Loring to William W. Folwell, handwritten letter, March 24, 1897, and [William W. Folwell,] “Parks, but Not Park,” handwritten text for speech, ca. 1902, both in William Watts Folwell and Family Papers, Minnesota, Box 18, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul (hereafter cited as WWF Papers); Loring scrapbooks, October 11, 1888, vol. 1, p. 16; Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 4:425-434; Wirth, 39.

¹⁴ *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. “Loring, Charles Morgridge”; Loring scrapbooks, June 22, 1885, vol. 1, p. 9, and October 2, 1888, vol. 1, p. 16.

¹⁵ [William W. Folwell,] “To the Honorable the Board of Park Commissioners,” handwritten notes, 1901, WWF Papers, Box 18; Neckar, 80-82; Wirth, 46, 205.

¹⁶ H. W. S. Cleveland to William Folwell, handwritten letter, October 22, 1890, WWF Papers, Box 18.

Another important figure in the evolution of the Grand Rounds was William Watts Folwell, who was appointed the first president of the University of Minnesota in 1869. He retired from that role in 1884 to devote more time to teaching and other civic activities, including service on the park board from 1889 to 1907. He was president of the board from 1895 to 1903. In 1890, he chaired a committee to evaluate the organization's progress to date and make recommendations for future park enlargement. The committee's report issued in the following year concluded that much had been accomplished towards carrying out Cleveland's plan. The committee expressed disappointment, however, that the parks did not yet present a cohesive system. There was also concern over the loss of momentum in park development in the previous two years: "The original plan has not only been neglected, but the Board and the public seem to have lost the idea of a plan."¹⁷

Cleveland concurred. In an October 1890 letter to Folwell, Cleveland bemoaned the "curtailment of very important portions of my original recommendations." The initial plan, he added, had been restricted by "a prudent regard for popular opinion," which included a strong faction against any park development. "The plans I first submitted," he explained, "were not as full as I would even then have been glad to offer, but they comprised all that I felt to be immediately essential."¹⁸

Rather than becoming discouraged, the committee instead expanded on Cleveland's original design, which had kept the parkways mostly within a two-mile radius of downtown Minneapolis. The committee, perhaps with Cleveland's guidance, envisioned a more far-reaching system. "Attention is invited," they wrote, "to the extension and completion of a great parkway, which shall practically encircle the solid parts of the city . . . forming the main framework of the park system."¹⁹

Work had already begun far south of the Lake Street/Thirty-fourth Avenue east-west connection that Cleveland had advocated: a wagon trail along Minnehaha Creek between Lake Harriet and Lyndale Avenue had been transformed into Minnehaha Boulevard (later "Parkway"), and plans to extend this route to Minnehaha Falls were in the works. The board had added the parkway around Lake of the Isles to Cleveland's original scheme in 1885, and the committee's 1891 report further expanded the Chain of Lakes to include Cedar Lake. A road would lead north from there to the vicinity of Birch Pond, purchased by the park board in 1889, which was located between Wayzata Boulevard and Glenwood Avenue. "North of Glenwood," the committee continued, "should be opened a park not less than 1,500 feet wide, extending to the northern limit of the city." An east-west parkway would link this park with another park in the city's northeast corner. The route would then run south, partly along Stinson Boulevard, to the university campus. This followed the spirit of the Cleveland plan, but the scope was much more ambitious—inspiring the committee to christen it "The Grand Rounds."²⁰

While some things were added to Cleveland's plan, it had become clear that other elements should be dropped. Hennepin and Lyndale Avenues were developing into major commercial thoroughfares, particularly with the introduction of a streetcar line along Hennepin, so the committee recommended transferring responsibility for these roads from the park board to the city. Also, Cleveland's suggestion for an ornate boulevard on Thirty-fourth Street between Lake Calhoun and the Mississippi was abandoned. Although the park board had acquired the section between Bloomington Avenue and the river by 1885, hopes for completing the boulevard were quashed by acquisition costs that had risen

¹⁷ "William Watts Folwell," in Henry A. Castle, ed., *Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1915), 2:917-918; Folwell et al. committee report in MBPC, *Eighth Annual Report, 1890*, 22-23.

¹⁸ H. W. S. Cleveland to William W. Folwell, handwritten letter, October 22, 1890, WWF Papers, Box 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*; Wirth, 62, 122-123.

dramatically in just a few short years. The committee warned that the same fate could befall other areas sought for park use, so acquisitions should proceed without delay.²¹

Progress on implementing the significantly greater scale of work in north Minneapolis was advanced in 1892 when the board procured 183 acres for Columbia Park. On the south side, acquisition of the Mississippi riverfront and bluffs continued to go slowly. Cleveland was active in the cause, calling on inter-city rivalry to foster support for the acquisition of the Mississippi River gorge. Saint Paul had purchased land opposite the outlet of Minnehaha Creek and was planning a parkway from there upriver to Marshall Avenue. If the Minneapolis side “is suffered to be stripped of its trees and seamed with quarries, the whole neighborhood will be given over to those who can afford only cheap homes. It would be a standing and conspicuous reproach and stigma upon Minneapolis and one with which St. Paul might justly taunt her from its contrast with the superb development of her own side of the river.” His advice was seconded by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., who toured the Twin Cities in the late 1890s and urged the park board to cut funds from maintenance and other improvements, if necessary, to acquire the river banks. Ironically, the board originally had more success on the east rather than the west side of the river, in the area between the university campus and the Saint Paul border. By 1894, the board had acquired land and developed a parkway along the river through the campus and as far south as Franklin Avenue. It was not until 1905 that the board had secured all of the river’s west bank from Franklin to Minnehaha Park.²²

Nature Enhanced

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, landscape architects voiced their disdain for those who overtly tampered with the natural environment. Cleveland expressed rather extreme emotion over the subject, asserting that people “who can see no beauty in Nature till they have washed her face and combed her hair and put her in stays,—should be hurled headlong from the precipice whose features they would thus desecrate.” Despite such emphatic statements, however, Cleveland and his compatriots substantially altered the landscapes that nature had given them.²³

In Minneapolis, this was dramatically displayed by the dredging of the lakes. The park board’s first undertaking of this type was initiated in the winter of 1883-1884 in Central (Loring) Park at Cleveland’s behest. Jewett Lake, Johnson Pond, and adjacent marshland were combined into a single pool, which was further refined by the removal of a floating bog. The total cost of the project was about \$7,500.²⁴

Nearly ten times that amount was spent on the first dredging project at Lake of the Isles, which began in 1889 and continued intermittently for four years. The lake’s north end was deepened and extended towards Franklin Avenue. The dredged material was used to fill in about 4.5 acres of a marsh on the east shore. It was the first of many major dredging operations initiated by the park board. As a later superintendent observed, “The very extensive program of general Lake District improvements . . . , in the course of many years of dredging operations (1907 to 1931), affected nearly every lake in the park system.” Although Cleveland was not around to oversee this phase of landscaping, his work on Central Park provided a model for these improvements. While the main purpose of these efforts was to create attractive parks, a significant side benefit was the increase in value of property in the vicinity of the park.

²¹ H. W. S. Cleveland to William W. Folwell, handwritten letter, October 22, 1890, WWF Papers, Box 18; Wirth, 107.

²² Wirth, 63, 69, 81, 157; Cleveland, *Aesthetic Development*, 16; [Folwell,] “Parks, but Not Park”; Warren H. Manning, “Report on Minneapolis Parks, January 13, 1900,” typescript, WWF Papers, Box 18.

²³ Blegen, *H. W. S. Cleveland*, n.p.

²⁴ Wirth, 101-102.

The park board, again following Cleveland's example, often emphasized this fact to justify their expenditures.²⁵

The hundreds of thousands of cubic feet of sand, clay, gravel, and loam that were rearranged did not always cooperate with the park board's plans. Filled areas developed muddy low spots, or the ground dried and became riddled with deep crevices. While some lakes adjusted to their new contours, shoreline eroded at others. The stone-faced concrete walls ringing the chain of lakes, many produced by federal relief projects in the 1930s, attest to the challenge of maintaining manmade lakeshores.

The board also excavated channels between the lakes. Although long discussed, the feasibility of creating navigable connections between the lakes was not seriously explored until 1907. When the channel between Cedar Lake and Lake of the Isles was excavated, Cedar Lake's water level dropped five feet creating a peninsula, Franklin Point (also known as Finlander's Point), out of an island and expanding nearby Cedar Point. The channel between Cedar and Brownie Lakes, previously passable only by small rowboats, was finally completed in 1917. A seven-foot drop in elevation between Lakes Calhoun and Harriet made it impossible to establish a navigable link between them.²⁶

While lake dredging was a long, undramatic process, channel projects stimulated intense public interest, particularly the connection of Lake of the Isles and Lake Calhoun. "Never in the history of the city," noted Superintendent Wirth, "had there been such widespread enthusiasm and so elaborate preparations for a civic event—since it was considered that the accomplishing of the lake connections marked an epoch in the forward growth and beautification of Minneapolis." The momentous occasion was celebrated by a week of special activities beginning July 2, 1911. One of the highlights was a Fourth of July torchlight water parade on Lake Harriet. Arranged by the Lake Harriet Canoe Club, the parade featured "hundreds of gayly-decorated water craft, including illuminated canoes, rowboats, and war canoes—followed by a brilliant display of fireworks." After the ceremony to officially dedicate the channel on July 5, steam whistles blew across the city for five minutes. That evening, a waterborne parade on Lake of the Isles included "replicas of ancient water craft illuminated and manned by crews in picturesque historical costumes."²⁷

The flow of Minnehaha Falls was also not entrusted to natural forces. In 1925, a 731-foot-deep well was dug in Longfellow Gardens "to maintain the small, picturesque lakelet" and to "serve as a reserve reservoir for the falls." The well was not, however, able to meet the challenge presented by long, dry summers. Water was sometimes diverted from Bassett's Creek into the Chain of Lakes to help prime the falls, but more dramatic interventions were occasionally required. In 1964, the park board reported that "we had to supply water from City water mains to make a display of the falls for the Svenskarnas Dag celebration held at Minnehaha Park at which gathering President L. B. Johnson was the guest speaker."²⁸

Transformations in the Twentieth Century

In the late nineteenth century, the park board's primary focus had been south Minneapolis, leaving the city's north side under-served. In about 1902, park board president William Folwell complained that "while Minneapolis has a park system on paper, she has not yet a system in fact. The great encircling parkway sometimes called 'The Grand Rounds,' planned by Mr. Cleveland is not more than half acquired, but slightly improved."²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 90-91, 96-99.

²⁶ Ibid., 92, 96, 140.

²⁷ Ibid., 94-95.

²⁸ MBPC, *Forty-third Annual Report, 1925*, 34-35, and *Eighty-second Annual Report, 1964*, 71.

²⁹ [Folwell,] "Parks, but Not Park."

Cleveland had grown less active and returned to Chicago in the years before his death in 1900, so the park board sought advice from another prominent landscape architect, Warren Manning. Manning worked for Olmsted before establishing his own practice in Boston in 1896. The universe of professional and avocational landscape architects in the late nineteenth century was small, and Manning was well acquainted with the leaders of the Minneapolis Park Board. Most belonged to the Park and Outdoor Art Association, which was established at a conference in Louisville, Kentucky, in May 1897 “to promote the conservation of natural scenery, the acquirement and improvement of land for public parks and reservations and the advancement of all outdoor art having to do with the designing and fitting of grounds for public and private use and enjoyment.” Manning served as secretary for the group; Loring was president in 1899 and 1900. The association convened its second annual conference in Minneapolis June 23, 1898, reflecting the national prominence of the city’s park system and the active involvement of local residents, including Loring and Folwell, in the association.³⁰

Probably Manning’s first commission for the park board was an 1899 plan for “East Side Park” on the bluff and Mississippi River flats by the University of Minnesota. The plan, which was never realized, included a large outdoor athletic facility similar to the one along the Charles River in Boston. Carriage, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic were carefully separated within the park, a recurrent concern along the Grand Rounds, particularly as cars replaced carriages as a primary mode of transportation.³¹

Also in 1899 the board hired Manning to review the city’s park system and make recommendations for future improvements. His report, issued in January 1900, called “for the enlargement of the system along lines previously suggested by Professor Cleveland, and for still further extension of the system beyond that proposed enlargement,” according to a later superintendent, Theodore Wirth. Some changes were relatively minor: more plantings and playground equipment for Loring and Riverside Parks, for example, and strategic vegetation along Minnehaha Creek to “keep open meadows, interior views and vistas and provide border plantations to shut out objectionable structures that may be placed in the future along the boundaries.” Other landscaping and development issues were more urgent: at Minnehaha Park a “radical change in the existing plan” was recommended to handle the increasing crowds visiting the site. He also urged land acquisition and the extension of parkways around Lake Calhoun and Cedar Lake, as well as the purchase of Lake Amelia (Nokomis) and Rice (Hiawatha) Lake. Columbia Park, he maintained, was “peculiarly well adapted for an arboretum.”³²

An economic depression delayed the implementation of these ambitious plans, and many of the ideas were, ultimately, abandoned. The park board did not, however, give up on launching a new development campaign. Superintendent Berry’s retirement at the end of 1905 after twenty-two years of service marked the end of the initial phase of the Grand Rounds. He was succeeded by Theodore Wirth, who was to remain at the helm until 1935 and oversee a major new era of park development. Wirth was born in Switzerland in 1863 and showed an early interest in gardening. After training in horticulture and engineering, including work with public and private gardens in Zurich, London, and Paris, he came to the United States in 1888. He gained further experience from jobs in New York’s Central Park, at the Niagara Falls Reservation, and with private estates in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Long Island. In 1896 he

³⁰ William Grundmann, “Warren H. Manning,” in *American Landscape Architecture*, ed. William H. Tishler (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1989), 56-59; John C. Olmsted to members of the Committee on Constitution and By-laws of the Park and Outdoor Art Association, typed memorandum, n.d., and Warren H. Manning to “Dear Sir,” letter soliciting membership in Park and Outdoor Art Association, [ca. 1897], WWF Papers, Box 18; Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 4:431.

³¹ Warren H. Manning to William W. Folwell, typed letter, July 18, 1899, WWF Papers, Box 18.

³² Wirth, 68; Warren H. Manning, “Report on Minneapolis Parks, January 13, 1900,” typescript, WWF Papers, Box 18.

became the first superintendent for the new park commission of Hartford, Connecticut, where he developed a number of parks during his decade-long tenure.³³

“When I arrived in Minneapolis,” Wirth later reflected, “there was already in existence a strong demand for the improvement of park properties already in the city’s possession, and equally vigorous requests for park acquisitions from those sections of the city that were as yet only sparingly, if at all, provided for.” Wirth’s efforts to address these needs were greatly enhanced by passage of the Elwell Law in 1911. The law allowed the park board to raise money for neighborhood parks by issuing bonds secured by special assessments against property owners in the vicinity who benefited from the improvements.³⁴

One of Wirth’s first goals upon becoming superintendent was to extend the Grand Rounds north. Acquisition of lands south and west of Cedar Lake in 1908 and the construction of a parkway there in 1914 began to bring the board’s 1891 plans to reality. This route was extended north by Glenwood (Wirth) Parkway, developed between 1910 and 1915, and still further by Glenwood-Camden Parkway, for which land was acquired in 1910 and 1911.³⁵

Although improvement plans for these parkways were postponed by World War I, that conflict ultimately stimulated work in the northwest. In 1919 Charles Loring, still a strong supporter of the Minneapolis park system, donated elms to commemorate each of the 568 Hennepin County residents who died during the war. He also provided a \$50,000 endowment expected to generate \$2,500 a year for the perpetual care of memorial trees along the Grand Rounds. Superintendent Wirth proposed that the trees be concentrated in one location rather than spread throughout the system, leading the board to designate 8.5 miles of the Glenwood-Camden Parkway in the northwest corner of The Grand Rounds as a memorial parkway. The northern 3.5 miles received a more formal design treatment. Victory Memorial Drive was dedicated with an elaborate ceremony in 1921. In 1923, a plaza ringed by eight bronze tablets with the names of those who had died in World War I was dedicated at the intersection of Xerxes and Forty-fourth Avenues North. A year later, the memorial’s scope was extended to the Civil War, when the “Grand Army Circle” was created by ten trees commemorating the ten posts of the Grand Army of the Republic. A statue of Abraham Lincoln was placed in the circle’s center in 1929.³⁶

A number of the original Moline elms were lost to Minnesota’s harsh winters in the decade after the drive was developed, requiring replacement by heartier stock. The names of the service men and women were noted on wood markers beside the trees. In 1928, the markers were replaced by bronze crosses and Stars of David. Originally, these markers stood vertically; beginning in 1954, they were set horizontally in a concrete bed at ground level to ease maintenance and discourage vandalism. A massive tower planned for the corner of Forty-fifth Street and Xerxes Avenue North never materialized. Instead, the memorial at that location received a more modest expansion in 1948 when the flagpole was mounted on a substantial granite base; granite also replaced the original brick bases supporting the eight bronze tablets.³⁷

America’s prosperity following World War I supported other major improvements to the northern half of the Grand Rounds. To the northeast, work was initiated in 1917 to make Saint Anthony Boulevard continuous from Camden Place to East Hennepin Avenue. The project was slowed by the significant amount of fill required for bridges over the Soo Line and Northern Pacific railroads. The 5.1-mile

³³ Wirth, 74; “Theodore Wirth Named as Superintendent Emeritus,” *Parks and Recreation* 18 (1934-1935): 460-464.

³⁴ Wirth, 75, 248.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

³⁶ Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 4:432-434.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:433; Wirth, 144-146; “Memorial Markers to be Shifted,” *Minneapolis Star*, January 14, 1954; MBPC, *Forty-seventh Annual Report, 1929*, 103; “Parks Accept Memorial,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 13, 1948; Bob Bork, “After 55 Years, Another Ceremony,” n.p., [1976], newspaper clipping in Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Public Library.

parkway was officially opened in September 1924 with “a well-attended parade and dedication exercises at Columbia Park.” Wirth noted that “with the construction of the parkways leading to the northern part of the city, the circuit of the Grand Rounds parkway system really began to materialize.”³⁸

Dredging and landscaping Lakes Nokomis and Hiawatha filled out the system’s southern end. The Nokomis dredging project, a massive rearrangement of nearly 2.5 million cubic yards of earth, was the largest that the park board had undertaken. The dredged material was first used to build dikes to form the new shoreline; then, the remaining material was dumped behind the dikes to raise the level of low-lying land. The same process was used from 1929 to 1931 to create Lake Hiawatha, formerly know as Rice—or Mud—Lake.³⁹

During the same period, Minnehaha Parkway was paved and sections were rerouted. The project was controversial, with critics feeling it was “detrimental and even destructive to the natural scenic beauty of the parkway.” The park board defended its action, observing that the new “main driveway, winding its way through the valley along graceful curves, avoids all the steeper grades over the hills and leaves the former roadways more available for their original purpose as service drives for the adjoining residential districts.” Parkway improvements, the board noted, stimulated development in these neighborhoods and “exercised a decided influence upon the character of the buildings erected, as is evidenced by the architectural beauty of the large number of stately new homes. Who can gainsay that the parks and parkways are the best means of building a City Beautiful, and are a sound and well-paying investment?”⁴⁰

To complement the improvement of Minnehaha Parkway, park board crews erected six bridges in 1924 and another three in the following year, all designed by park board engineers. The park board’s 1924 annual report noted that the new bridges were of “pleasing appearance and their designs appropriate to their respective localities.”⁴¹

The 1920s was also an era of monumental bridge construction. In the early 1920s, Minneapolis built an open-spandrel, reinforced-concrete arch bridge to carry Nicollet Avenue over the broad and deep valley of Minnehaha Creek. For Franklin Avenue over the Mississippi, the city erected another concrete-arch bridge between 1919 and 1923. Dedicated as the Cappelen Memorial Bridge in honor of its designer, Minneapolis city engineer Frederick William Cappelen, the structure’s 400-foot center span was the longest of its type in the world when it was built. The park board worked closely with the city on the design of the approaches on the East and West River Parkways. The park board was also involved with the west approach to the Inter-city (Ford Parkway) Bridge, again a concrete-arch design, constructed between 1925 and 1927. Planning for this bridge was complicated by the necessary cooperation between Minneapolis and Saint Paul.⁴²

The economic misery of the Great Depression in the 1930s provided another boost to developing the Grand Rounds. The parks were an ideal source of jobs for federal relief programs designed to put the unemployed back to work. Despite frequent changes in programs and funding, which sometimes made progress sporadic, nearly every part of the Grand Rounds benefited in some way from the infusion of federal subsidies. One of the first projects, initiated in 1933, transformed swamps at Glenwood (Wirth)

³⁸ Wirth, 140-141; MBPC, *Forty-second Annual Report, 1924*, 47, and *Forty-third Annual Report, 1925*, 31-33.

³⁹ MBPC, *Thirty-fourth Annual Report, 1916*, 53-54, *Thirty-fifth Annual Report, 1917*, 43, *Thirty-ninth Annual Report, 1921*, 28, *Fortieth Annual Report, 1922*, 24, *Forty-seventh Annual Report, 1929*, 101-102, and *Forty-ninth Annual Report, 1931*, 74.

⁴⁰ MBPC, *Forty-third Annual Report, 1925*, 33, and *Forty-second Annual Report, 1924*, 41-42.

⁴¹ MBPC, *Forty-second Annual Report, 1924*, 41, and *Forty-third Annual Report, 1925*, 28.

⁴² Nicolas Westbrook, ed., *A Guide to the Industrial Archeology of the Twin Cities* (prepared for the Twelfth Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial Archeology, Saint Paul and Minneapolis, 1983), 24-26; MBPC, *Fortieth Annual Report, 1922*, 37.

Park into a series of lagoons. Crews were initially provided by the Civil Works Administration (CWA). In May 1935, the project was continued by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which established a camp in the park for some two hundred workers. While the bunkhouses were of temporary construction, the mess hall, recreation building, and two offices were more sturdily built and became park board property after the project was finished.⁴³

A 250-man CWA crew started improving low areas south of Broadway for an extension of Stinson Boulevard to Eighteenth Avenue N.E. in 1934. This, it was hoped, would begin the process of filling in the gap in the otherwise complete loop of the Grand Rounds. Later, workers provided by the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 and by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) continued this project. Other crews graded the northern extension of Stinson from Lowry Avenue to Saint Anthony Boulevard and established a double roadway, surfaced with oiled gravel and divided by a broad landscaped median, all the way from Saint Anthony Boulevard to Broadway.⁴⁴

The park board first received WPA funding in October 1936, spending \$500,000 in that year and about \$1.5 million in the following year. Another \$1 million was expended by July 1938, when the board received word that President Roosevelt had approved a WPA grant of over \$2.6 million, covering eighty-four percent of a \$3.1 million park improvement plan. The park board funded the remainder. At the program's peak in 1938, about 3,000 men were engaged in park board work, including a number of projects along the Grand Rounds. West River Road was realigned, widened from twenty feet to thirty-two feet, paved from Lake Street to Minnehaha Park, and supplied with a number of parking concourses. The road was also extended upriver from Franklin Avenue to Third Street South, which required construction of substantial concrete and stone retaining walls. In addition, limestone walls were constructed at Thirty-sixth, Thirty-eighth, and Forty-fourth Streets. WPA funds also supported an assortment of other paving and drainage projects throughout the park system. In the following year, the board sought a \$1.5 million WPA grant to continue the work.⁴⁵

During the same period, planning began in earnest for a regional park system, which Cleveland had proposed as early as 1888. Nationally, the movement to develop regional parks had begun around that time, but few cities had been successful in founding such systems. In 1935, following the precedent of the Grand Rounds, Theodore Wirth proposed a metropolitan system encircling an area far beyond the limits of the development of Minneapolis's suburbs. It followed the Mississippi River upstream to Dayton, then turned to the southwest along the Crow River to Rockford. Heading south, the route was not completely continuous to Lake Sarah and Lake Independence, and no path was proposed through the Lake Minnetonka area. A few scattered sites were identified near Carver and Chaska. The system regained momentum to the southeast, where a broad forest preserve edged the Minnesota River from Eden Prairie and Shakopee to the river's outlet at the Mississippi. This plan laid the framework for a number of parks that were subsequently developed.⁴⁶

World War II and Beyond

⁴³ "CCC to Beautify Glenwood Park with New Lagoons," *Minneapolis Journal*, February 7, 1935; MBPC, *Fifty-second Annual Report, 1934*, 131-132, and *Fifty-third Annual Report, 1935*, 118.

⁴⁴ MBPC, *Fifty-second Annual Report, 1934*, 129, 132, *Fifty-third Annual Report, 1935*, 113-114, 117, and *Fifty-fifth Annual Report, 1937*, 101.

⁴⁵ "Allotment of WPA Money is OK'd by F.D.R.," *Minneapolis Star*, July 6, 1938; "Park Board Asks \$250,000 WPA Bonds," *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 2, 1939; MBPC, *Fifty-sixth Annual Report, 1938*, 97-103, and *Sixty-first Annual Report, 1943*, 50.

⁴⁶ Newton, 316; G. A. Parker, "The Trend of the Park Movement," *Charities and the Commons* 16 (July 7, 1906): 408; MBPC, *Fifty-third Annual Report, 1935*, 125; "Wirth's Projected Metropolitan Park System," n.p., November 26, 1935, newspaper clipping in vertical file, Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Public Library.

The Second World War diverted attention from the Grand Rounds. Materials, labor, and money were dedicated to the war effort. Except for emergency needs, the park board focused primarily on defense-related projects at the municipal airport, which it operated until 1943. After the war, the task of returning to civilian life consumed the public's energy for a decade. The late 1950s witnessed another burst of energy by the park board: facilities were renovated at Minnehaha State Park; West River Road was rerouted below the Franklin Avenue Bridge; Shingle Creek's passage through Webber Park was reconstructed; and oil-surfaced dirt roads lacking curbs and gutters, including Kenwood Parkway and East River Road south of Franklin, were finally paved.⁴⁷

The late 1950s also ushered in the era of the interstate. The impact on the Grand Rounds was clearly visible by the early 1960s. Interstate 94 cut between Webber Park and the Mississippi. Downstream, the same freeway passed under East River Road and over West River Road, appropriating a corner of Riverside Park. Loring Park was also affected by I-94 and its tangled intersection with Lyndale and Hennepin Avenues. Interstate 35W cast a shadow over Minnehaha Parkway, and made Stinson Boulevard's character seem even more industrial. Wirth Parkway became an exit for U.S. Highway 12; the exit was closed when the highway was transformed into Interstate 394, but the bridge over the highway remains a rather jarring interruption at the south end of Wirth Parkway.

New construction in the parks and parkways of the Grand Rounds also cut some of the system's ties with earlier decades. Earlier bathhouses, concession stands, and recreation centers were torn down and replaced by buildings reflecting the influence of the International Style. Often the scale of the buildings changed: some became more modest than their predecessors, while others grew into larger community centers.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that a campaign addressing the entire Grand Rounds system was launched. The board hired prominent San Francisco landscape architects Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams to analyze the Minneapolis parkway system. Eckbo concluded that the parkways, particularly the Chain of Lakes, were being used beyond their capacity. They proposed the development of a series of islands and peninsulas to extend the shoreline of the lakes, especially Calhoun. To reduce conflicts between cars and pedestrians, some sections of the parkways would be diverted away from the lakes, with trams to transport people between the lakes and remote parking lots. Eckbo's proposals met with formidable opposition. After several contentious years and significant input from a citizens' advisory committee, Eckbo's revised plans gained public support. The rehabilitation ushered in a number of changes. The pavement was colored to distinguish the parkway from regular city streets. Roadways were narrowed, then widened in some spots to provide parking bays. An entirely new visual vocabulary for park fixtures was employed, including new signage that utilized international symbols. The separation of pedestrian traffic also became a priority, particularly after the death of a pedestrian in a bicycle accident in 1973.⁴⁸

In addition to these internal changes, the vision of the system as a whole began to shift. The Mississippi River in downtown Minneapolis, once the center of the nation's flour-milling industry, had been largely abandoned for commercial use by World War II. By the 1970s, Minneapolis joined many cities across America in discovering the potential of long vacant riverfront buildings and land. Planners worked to extend the West River Road north to downtown Minneapolis in the 1980s and 1990s, creating an amenity to stimulate the riverfront's redevelopment. This also provided a more attractive route for the Great River Road, which overlapped with the Grand Rounds along the Mississippi. With this new extension along the riverfront, the refurbishment of the Stone Arch Bridge for pedestrian and bicycle use, and the opening of

⁴⁷ MBPC, *Seventy-first Annual Report, 1953*, 61, *Seventy-fifth Annual Report, 1957*, 57, 58, 60, *Seventy-sixth Annual Report, 1958*, 49, *Seventy-seventh Annual Report, 1959*, 53, and *Seventy-eighth Annual Report, 1960*, 51.

⁴⁸ Al Wittman, interview by Charlene Roise, December 15, 1998; Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams, "Minneapolis Parkway System: Concepts for the Future," prepared for the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 1971.

the Cedar Lake bicycle trail to the west, the Grand Rounds began looking, at least from the perspective of bicyclists, more like a figure eight.

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Transportation designated the Grand Rounds as a National Scenic Byway, making it the first (and so far only) urban system with that recognition. Two years later, the state of Minnesota named the Grand Rounds a State Scenic Byway.

While the implementation of Cleveland's vision has certainly differed from his original plans, there is no doubt that the Grand Rounds contribute a quality of life that many residents, within and outside of Minneapolis, value highly. Today, the Grand Rounds continues to be an important—and ever evolving—element of the city's character.

For more information on the Grand Rounds, visit www.minneapolisparcs.org/grandrounds. For information on the Missing Link project, visit the link in the left navigation bar on www.minneapolisparcs.org.

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