

COLVILL PARK HISTORY

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What is interesting about the history of a park and, for our purposes today, why is Colvill Park's history interesting? Surely the City bought the property and started maintaining the property for public use? Not exactly.

On July 21, 1908, a group of women gathered to found the Colvill Park Association. Their purpose was to "acquire and maintain the property now known as Colvill Park." This property, at that time about 30 acres in size, was part of the Colvill homestead in eastern Red Wing. This land was considered suitable for a public park because of its location on the river, allowing for people to reach it by land or by water. Col. Colvill called this area "Nymphaea," probably accounting for the naming of the lane entering the park.



By the end of the month, the women, who elected Mrs. Alice Neill as the first president, bought the land for a purchase price of \$1500.00. During a subscription drive to pay for the property, the ladies raised \$1,905.78. In addition to the cost of the land, \$282.50 was paid for dredging, and \$217.25 for bathhouses. All of this money (which, if you do some quick figuring, was not quite enough for the land, dredging, and bathhouses) and money raised later, was used on park upkeep until May of 1913, when the City took over the care of the park from the Park Association.

What led up to the founding of the Colvill Park Association? Why did a ladies' group step in—surely this was a city matter if it was to be a city park?

In its earlier history, this land was leased for the Guptill slaughterhouse and for livestock pasture. This was a large business, encompassing a butchery, a rendering house, a hog house, and a sheep house. The slaughterhouse employees used to keep children away from the swimming hole, thereby preventing recreational use of the land. Upset by the smells of the animal processing plant and feeling that the land could be put to public recreational use, Gust E. Freeman, longtime County Register of Deeds and nearby resident of today's park, in 1896 circulated a petition among the citizens of Red Wing to close the Guptill plant.



After presenting the petition to the City Council, the Council decided to adopt a resolution for abatement of the property. This was appealed to District Court and eventually found its way, in the spring of 1898, to the Supreme Court, which finally decided in the City's favor. Gust Freeman bought the property and allowed public picnicking and recreation on the premises. In fact, he refused to let the property be used for any other purpose.

The time came when improvements to the property needed to be made. Working with Nels Tufvesson of Public Works, Freeman approached the City about the possibility of a city park. Realizing that the parkland had historic as well as recreational significance, the Board of Public Works, by including \$1500.00 in their budget for the purchase of the land, brought this idea before the City Council. The Council, by one vote, denied the amount, claiming that they did not have the "authority to appropriate money for such purposes." Some council members considered the land too remote and therefore unsuitable for city park purposes.

Because the City Council was uncooperative, the whole Public Works Board—Nels Tufvesson, C. H. Boxrud, and D. M. Neill—resigned in protest over the lack of City support.

The *Red Wing Daily Republican*, the local newspaper headed by Jens K. Grondahl, joined the dispute. Grondahl and the newspaper took a very energetic role in the discussion of the future of this property. The project had tireless supporters and equally diligent opponents. Finally, the ladies that made up the Colvill Park Association stepped forward. Their interest, at least partially, most likely stemmed from the fact that two of them were married to former Public Works Board members. The Association held the land in trust for the City of Red Wing until the time came that it could be transferred to the City. The deed for the property specified that the land should "forever be maintained as a public park, bathing place and playground for children, and be known as Colvill Park." Objecting to these restrictions, the City Council tried to have them removed, but Freeman would not waver in his plans for the property.

Because of the objections, the City would not initially take over the property. The Colvill Park Association stepped in, and it has been said, "What the city 'fathers' couldn't accomplish in roughly 10 years, the city mothers took care of in 15 days!" They provided a safe park for recreational activities until the City took over five years later.

Since 1913, the City of Red Wing has been caring for Colvill Park, making the improvements that have given us the park that we have today—the park that citizens continue to support with beautification efforts such as the one that brings us here this morning.

(More Photos of the Very Early Colvill Park Below)

WORKS CONSULTED

"The Colvill Park Association" in Colvill Park file, GCHS.

Gust E. Freeman. "History of Colvill Park" in Colvill Park file, GCHS.

Oral history transcript, in Colvill Park file, GCHS.

EARLY PHOTOS OF COLVILL PARK

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1917 Red Wing Shoe Company picnic at Colvill Park

