

Memories and History by the Decade

1876 to 1880

On June 24th, 1876, Forest Park officially opened to an estimated 50,000-strong crowd. Purchased through \$1.3 million in thirty-year bonds at a 6% return, Forest Park consisted of 1,371 acres of St. Louis countryside, exceeding Central Park's 800 acres by 1.5 times.

At the time, urban areas suffered from the residual effects of the industrial revolution, which ranged from heavy smog to acid rain. St. Louis was one of the most adversely affected cities; many health professionals praised the clean air of the less developed countryside, which the Park was then considered, as beneficial to city-dwellers.

Forest Park was intended to match the grand public parks of Europe and other US cities, namely New York's Central Park, which was established in 1853. The Park was the vision of a number of progressive locals who felt that what the St. Louis public wanted was a Park that "the rich and poor, the merchant and mechanic, the professional man and the day laborer, each with his family and lunch basket, can come and enjoy his own . . . all without stint or hindrance . . . and there will be no notice put up, "Keep off the grass."

Founders of the Park had negotiated public transportation to the area in the form of a train from downtown, which brought thousands of visitors each day. In addition, in the first years of the Park's existence, 19 miles of gravel roads were laid at a cost of \$16,000 per mile.

Master Plan Story

The 1874 survey by Julius Pitzman showed that Forest Park consisted of 1,371.75 acres, and today it is still one of the largest urban parks in the country.

Memory

"We lived near Forest Park. My mother would take us children there on a hot night and lay a blanket on the grass, and we would fall asleep in the cool park."

--Mrs. Coffee Barksdale

1880 to 1890

Under new management and a stretched budget after becoming an entity of the newly separated St. Louis city, Forest Park officials struggled to continue developing recreational areas and support structures.

Areas that prospered however included the nursery, which was established to provide plants and landscaping, and the Missouri Fish Commission's fish-rearing operations, whose carp-spawning operations grew so large that the fish were used to populate lakes throughout the state.

Until the summer of 1885, the only public transportation remained by train - streetcar lines had not been extended to the Park. This limited the numbers of people who used the Park primarily to those on horseback or in vehicles of some kind. Even for people who rode in carriages or on horseback, the trip was dusty and hot in the summer months, muddy and buggy in fall and spring.

As the city spread further west and encroached upon the eastern border of the Park, things began to change. In 1885 streetcar lines were extended to the Park, and hundreds of thousands of people began visiting each year.

Master Plan Story

Jefferson Lake and the six Fish Hatchery Lakes in Forest Park have been drained, deepened, aerated and improved for fishing and angler access. A new Columbus Bridge has been built to cross the section of the river that will run under Grand Drive near Round Lake.

Memory

"I guess you could say I have a special relationship with this magnificent expanse of trees, streets, and various sports and recreational areas covering more than 1,300 acres. Here I am in the early twilight years of my life and as I reflect on the different phases in growing up, it certainly has had an impact on me."

--Warren H. Fine

1890 to 1900

By 1896 the seven streetcar lines that served Forest Park carried a total of more than 2.5 million Park-goers a year. Two pavilions abutting streetcar lines, the Lindell Pavilion and the Laclede Pavilion, were built in the early '90s to accommodate the crowds. The Laclede Pavilion was torn down in 1938; the Lindell Pavilion partially burned down in 1924 and has been restored in a variety of capacities, finally as a Visitor and Education Center for Forest Park.

Developers' visions of a fashionable neighborhood surrounding the Park came to fruition as private streets took hold north and east of the Park in what came to be known as the Central West End.

From its inception, Forest Park was a focal point for athletics of all kinds, and by the turn of the century local teams played lacrosse, cricket, football, baseball, tennis, and golf on the many fields available. To meet still-increasing demand, a driving club and the Amateur Athletic Association were both established in the 1890's.

In addition to team sports, the Park offered concessions including rowboats, ice skates, ponies, burros, carts, and more. An amusement-Park area called Forest Park Highlands housed a roller coaster and other rides, and an informal zoo sprouted up from donations of animals including elk, birds, and even buffalo.

Park-goers proposed an extension of the main lake but officials could not support the measure, so the Post-Dispatch took fundraising into its own hands and those of its readership (explaining the name of Post-Dispatch Lake). Donations exceeded \$19,000, at a time when \$1.00 would buy 50 pounds of flour and a man's suit cost about \$7.50.

Master Plan Story

The new Boathouse embraces the casual charm of the old facility, but now provides heating and cooling systems, improved rest room facilities and allows for simultaneous use by the public and private parties. Post-Dispatch Lake has expanded with new lagoons, a picnic island and an island devoted to wildlife conservation.

Memory

"I am very surprised that no one has mentioned the Forest Park Highlands. What fond memories I have of the school picnics we had at the Highlands. My whole family would go to the Park and we rode every ride, ate till we were ready to burst, and rode some more. It was a sad day when I stood on my porch and watched the smoke blacken the sky as it burned. Many wonderful memories were brought back that day for me as a child. The Zoo is one of the best in the world, and everyone should remember Phil the Gorilla. Even though I no longer live in St. Louis, it is still my home town."

-- Mrs. Joan Rothschild, Florida



1900 to 1910

At the turn of the century, St. Louis developers and politicians successfully lobbied for the city to host the 1904 World's Fair, which came to be known as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Despite initial suggestions that the Fair grounds be placed downtown, along the banks of the Mississippi River, Forest Park officials eventually secured the Park as the official grounds.

Washington University, which was constructing its main administration buildings at the time, agreed to delay moving into the buildings until after the Fair. The University loaned what is now known as Brookings Hall to the Fair for its administrative headquarters.

The School and Museum of Fine Arts, also a branch of Washington University, was completing its plan to build a museum in the Park when it was determined that the Fair would have to have a permanent, fire-proof structure for its Palace of Fine Arts. The groups got together and determined that the building, constructed upon the Park's highest hill, would be handed over to the School and Museum after the fair. The Museum is the only Fair structure that remains standing today; all other exhibition palaces were temporary, built of plaster and wood.

In all, more than 900 structures were built to house exhibits from 22 countries and 44 US cities, concession stands, concerts and more. The city also hosted the 1904 Olympics, the third of the modern era, and the first-ever in the U.S.

The fair was a tremendous success - more than 20 million attendees visited the fair between April 30th and December 1st, 1904 - upwards of 100,000 people per day. But the wear and tear on Forest Park was noticeable; the next seven years were spent putting the Park back together.

Master Plan Story

Grand Basin was originally conceived as the focus of the 1904 World's Fair and demolished immediately after. The master plan renovation restored the area to its formal historic grandeur with pedestrian promenades, overlooks and landings, pavilions, decorative lighting, fountains and dramatic views from the Basin up to the Art Museum.

Memory

"As a child my mother lived with her family in a big old house on Grand Avenue and Flad. She vividly remembered Sunday rides in their open carriage in the summer evenings when they went to Forest Park and to the small pavilion in front of the Muny Opera to hear musical events, before the Muny was even built. Once, on the ride back home, she fell asleep with her little hand hanging out of the carriage, and lost her favorite ring. It all seems so long ago, and I guess it was. She was born in 1898. Her name was Eugenia Marguerete Rose Uhri, later married to James A. Maritz."

-- *Jean Hobler*

1910 to 1920

Restoration of the Park after the Fair continued in the 1910s. The most significant structures built soon after the fair included the World's Fair Pavilion, offering public rest rooms and shelter from sun and rain, and the Jefferson Memorial, home of the Missouri Historical Society.

Dwight F. Davis became Park commissioner in 1911, and he and like-minded followers ran the Park through the early 1930s. Davis was an enthusiastic proponent of recreational and athletic activities for the public. In 1912 the first official public golf course in St. Louis, nine holes in all and free, opened in the Park. It was soon expanded to 18 holes and another nine-hole course was added. Davis also built 32 public tennis courts.

In 1917 a coalition raised the funds and interest to build the Municipal Theatre, or the Muny, as it came to be known. The 10,000-seat theatre's first productions were *Aida* and *I Pagliacci*. From the very beginning, free seats were offered within the theatre and above the seats on the grass. The regular summer musical season so popular today was initiated in 1919.

In 1918 the city set aside land on the South side of the Park for a landing field for airmail service, also erecting a hangar that currently serves as the headquarters for the Mounted Police. The airfield was used as a mail delivery stop for less than a year, after which private pilots used the facility for exhibition flights.

Master Plan Story

The new Hale Irwin-designed golf course features three nine-hole courses that may be played in combination for eighteen, with each nine-hole course returning to the Clubhouse. At the suggestion of Norman K. Probst, the lead donor to the renovation, the three courses are named for native Missouri trees: "Hawthorn," "Dogwood" and "Redbud."

Memory

My family kept two horses at the Missouri stables. Dad's horse was Betty Jane Forest, a registered American Saddle Horse from Mexico, Missouri; and my small horse was a flea-bitten gray named Nellie. Dad rode with a Cuban Army Officer's Saddle, and I had a WWI McClennan Saddle. There were three active stables in the area, and our weekly ride was one of the highlights of my childhood."

-- *Edwin B. "Bud" Meissner, Jr.*

1920 to 1930

The Zoo saw significant enhancements during the 20s. The natural looking bear pits, constructed of concrete and using cast molds of limestone bluffs above the Mississippi near Herculaneum, were added in the early 20s. They received national recognition for their natural appearance. The Zoo's Primate House opened in 1925; the Reptile House in 1927.

In 1925 the Lindell Pavilion, which had housed restrooms, locker rooms, and a pro shop, partially burned down. The replacement building, the Field House and Restaurant, kept the pavilion's foundation and tower, and offered expanded locker facilities and a restaurant.

The Park's largest crowds that decade came on June 19, 1927, when more than 100,000 people jammed Art Hill to welcome Charles A. Lindbergh back to St. Louis after his nonstop flight from New York to Paris. Though Lindbergh had lived in St. Louis only two years, he made the city world famous by naming his plane the Spirit of St. Louis at the request of a group of businessmen who had funded his aviation efforts.

In 1929, before the highway was constructed cutting it off from the Park, a building that few St. Louisans now think of as part of Forest Park opened: the St. Louis Arena. With room for seating for 21,000, it was the largest building of its kind in the world, and boasted more floor space than Madison Square Garden.

Master Plan Story

The refurbished Lindell Pavilion will be converted into a Visitor and Education Center, featuring classrooms, public meeting and special event space, a gift shop, restaurant, and a major trailhead for the recreational path with lockers and changing facilities.

Memory

"I fondly recall when (circa, the late 1920's), as a young boy, together with a companion, we rented a canoe from the boathouse, from where we paddled out into the Grand Basin to a point in close to the green of the 17th hole on the 18-hole golf course, where 'accidentally' our canoe tipped over. As we balanced ourselves in water of waist- to shoulder-height depth, I could feel the abandoned golf balls trickling at the toes of my bare feet, begging to be retrieved. Well, after we had rescued sufficient balls to maintain the buoyancy of our up righted canoe (as well of a supply to satisfy our golfing needs for the season and then some), we continued our canoe ride. Yes, I do love Forest Park and the nostalgic memories associated with it!"

-- Paxton Ackerman

1930 to 1940

Between 1930 and 1945 shortages of money, manpower and materials caused by the great depression and WWII made Park maintenance incredibly difficult.

Still, improvements were made. Two new waterfalls were built: the Seven Pools, near the southeastern corner, and the Cascades, near the Museum and Lindell Boulevard. In 1930 electric boats were introduced in the Grand Basin and were so popular that people sometimes waited until after midnight to rent one.

After receiving large crowds at flower shows in one of the Park's greenhouses, the Park commissioner decided to build a greenhouse for the sole purpose of accepting visitors. The design was intended to admit the greatest amount of light in winter, reduce hail damage, and reduce maintenance costs; all of the building's horizontal surfaces were metal. The Jewel Box opened in 1936 and worked as its creators had imagined, achieving national recognition for its design.

As St. Louis' population base continued to spread west, city planners began looking at traffic congestion. The city ultimately decided to build an east-west roadway parallel to Oakland Ave on the Southside of the Park, taking the parcel from Park land. The Oakland Expressway, which would later connect to Highway 40, opened in 1936.

Master Plan Story

The Jewel Box's new design reorganized the interior to allow for flexibility, floral displays, and a new fountain while accommodating seated weddings for up to 250 people or seated dinner events for up to 150 guests.



Memory

" . . . That was a wonderful evening. We danced, I sparkled, Joe glowed; we were happy. The next day, we all went to Forest Park. Inside the Jewel Box somebody took a picture of us standing on either side of a lamppost. Afterward, we would tell people that picture was taken on the very day that we realized we were in love with each other! . . . Forest Park has been a place of magic for me and for my family ever since that unexpected weekend visit during a time of war and uncertainty. I love the place."

-- *Kelly Cuba*

1940 to 1950

It was during the 40s that the Muni improved its selection of popular shows, versus traditional opera, and attracted national attention, at the same time that outdoor theatres across the country were closing down. Fortune magazine noted that the Municipal Opera "probably has no counterpart anywhere; it seems to appeal to almost everybody." It was also during this decade that the Muni received significant architectural improvements, including the circular box office that still operates today.

The Parks Department first erected directional signs in the early 1940s, though many still lost their way on the windy roads of the park.

In the mid-40s the National Aviation Trades Association attempted to revive the Forest Park airfield near the mounted police station in the hopes of attracting businessmen in private planes, but the plans fell through, and eventually the airfield was taken over by athletic fields, now known as Aviation Field.

During WWII, Forest Park housed a recreation camp for men on weekend leave; the camp could accommodate up to 1,500 white servicemen. The Army Recreation Camp for Negroes, however, was more than a mile away at Spring and Chouteau. After the war, in the late 40s, blacks and whites worked together to end segregation in uses of the Park's facilities, including the tennis courts, golf courses, and more. In 1948 seating at the Muni was peacefully opened to all.

Master Plan Story

In addition to the restoration of current facilities at Boeing Aviation Field, a performance level baseball field, practice field and limestone concession building/comfort station have been added. The field has been re-graded, irrigated, landscaped and new lighting installed.

Memory

"I lived in 'Parkview' just off Skinker and would ride my bike into the Park for the day. My friends and I would 'cool off' in the waterfall by the golf course. The Park police would always run us off ...We would pretend to leave, but stayed all day. Our parents never worried about us. This was in the early '40's."

-- *Gloria Curtis*

1950 to 1960

In 1955 the Park received its largest single donation in its first hundred years, for construction of the Mark C Steinberg Memorial Skating Rink. The rink, which opened in 1957, could be used throughout winter, regardless of weather conditions, and was used as a skating rink in summer. The private donor made the gift with the stipulation that the rink be open to all people, making it one of the few desegregated venues in St. Louis at the time.

Construction on the Forest Park Parkway, a roadway running along the Northern edge of the Park, began in 1959. It was also during this time that planning was initiated on linking the Oakland Expressway to U.S. Highway 40.

At the end of the decade plans were submitted for a planetarium project on the land where the old Mounted Police Station had originally stood. Designs from St. Louis firm Hellmuth, Obata, and Kassabaum were selected.

The Muny continued to do well in the 50s: Time magazine attributed the Muny's continuing popularity and financial success to "the quality of its performances. Even a foreign critic from Dallas recently admitted that St. Louis' municipal opera is to summer operetta companies 'what the Metropolitan is to grand opera.' Unlike the Met, however, the Muny has no deficit."

Master Plan Story

Located adjacent to the Muny's North entrance, Pagoda Circle was the site of the Park's first bandstand, which blew down in a storm. In 1925 St. Louis attorney Nathan Frank donated funds for a permanent structure, making him the first private donor to Forest Park. Pagoda Circle was completely renovated in 2000; three new bridges were built, and extensive landscaping was installed.

Memory

"(I remember) Being an extra at the Muny Opera for the production of 'Good News' -- we were told to open our mouths but not to sing! At age 14 that was lots of fun."

--*Elain C. Hardy*

1960 to 1970

It was during the 1960s that the Zoo finally separated itself from the land surrounding it, and built entrances and the serpentine wall to differentiate the Zoo's land from the rest of the Park. The walls, based on walls designed by Thomas Jefferson on the UVA campus, were only symbolic; the Zoo was still free and open to all. The Zoo train began operating in 1963, providing an enjoyable ride, a rest for the feet, and additional revenue for the zoo.

In 1963 the Planetarium opened to the East of the Zoo. Like all other Park attractions, the Planetarium was open and free to the public, and charged a nominal fee only to view the Star Show.

In 1968 tens of thousands of white and black St. Louisans attended a memorial service in the Park after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. The service concluded a march that began at the riverfront Arch. City organizers planned free bus service back downtown and throughout the city from the Park to prevent any skirmishes, and many attribute the planning to the lack of violence that was witnessed in other cities.

Master Plan Story

The word riparian is defined as "of, situated, or dwelling on the bank of a river or other body of water." Forest Park Forever has initiated riparian plantings along the new river's edge throughout the park. James van Sweden of the landscape design firm of Oehme van Sweden joined the City's Forest Park master plan team; initial installation of the Riparian plantings began in the spring of 2000.

Memory

It was January of 1965, my senior year in High School, and I had just met the girl who would become my wife. St Louis was in the grip of a very cold winter, so it was off to Art Hill for nighttime sledding. Things were going great until our last trip down the hill. We kept gaining speed and passing everyone else and then we hit the cinders that are supposed to slow runaway sleds. But we didn't stop! That is until the runners hit the concrete wall of the Basin around Post Dispatch Lake. Then we stopped dead and I kept going - feet first through the ice and into about 3 ý feet of the coldest water I had ever felt. We eventually were married and we went back to Art Hill and the Park often over the years, and my wife would always recite the details of that night in '65 when we learned the value of laughing at ourselves.

-- *Dan Uhlhorn*

1970 to 1980

The city's declining tax base during the post-war period made the city-only zoo tax inadequate to maintain and expand the zoo. Periodically, the idea of charging admission was considered. In 1971 voters in both St. Louis and St. Louis County prevented such an admission charge and surprised many observers by voting to form a Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District (usually called the zoo-museum district), which established a property tax to support the zoo, art museum and the museum of science and natural history, later known as the Science Center.

In the years that followed, the Missouri Historical Society and Missouri Botanical Garden were added to the district. The larger tax base in the newly combined area produced about twice as much revenue as the previous collections in the city alone. Outside the walls of these institutions, Forest Park itself has never been part of the tax district.

In 1976 Big Cat Country opened at the zoo and won the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums prize for the best new exhibit. That same year the Art Museum began renovation of the east wing and announced plans for a new wing surrounding the earlier auditorium addition. The renovated wing opened in 1977.

Also in the 1970s, Henry Stolar, then alderman for the Forest Park neighborhood, came up with the idea to build a bike path in Forest Park with donated asphalt. Naysayers insisted that no one would come to Forest Park to ride their bikes. Stolar persevered, and today the Forest Park recreational path is one of the Park's most popular features.

Master Plan Story

To alleviate congestion on the recreational path, planners suggested a two-pronged "heels and wheels" system that would increase the capacity of the path system and, for the most part, separate those traveling at very different velocities. Walkers, joggers, and those pushing carriages may opt for a new softer surface path, while speedier users such as bicyclists and roller-bladers continue to use the asphalt path.

Memory

I have fond memories of "Thursday Family Days" when my parents, sisters and I would spend the day in Forest Park enjoying the monkey, elephant and sea lion shows. Phil the Gorilla was always an attraction, especially when he "did his job" on the crowd! We always looked forward to going to the zoo and it was one of our favorite summer activities. As an adult and parent we spent many days at the zoo with our own children and now do the same with our granddaughter or even just by ourselves all year long. What a special place!

-- *Carolyn Suffian*

1980 to 1990

In the early 80s the Science Museum, then located in Clayton's Oak Knoll Park, announced plans to buy an office building opposite the Planetarium across highway 40, and in 1983 city and county voters approved a tax increase for the museum. The city sold the planetarium to the museum for \$1 and leased it the land under the building.

With more than 12 million visitors annually and inadequate funding, it became apparent to city officials and neighborhood groups that increased funds would be required to repair and improve the historic structures, recreational facilities and complex ecological system within the park. It was critical that Forest Park remain beautiful and accessible.

Forest Park Forever, a private, not-for-profit organization, was founded in 1986 to work in partnership with the St. Louis City Department of Parks, Recreation and Forestry to make Forest Park the finest urban park in the nation. Initial efforts by Forest Park Forever raised money to make improvements upon existing facilities within the park.

Over the next several years, money was raised by Forest Park Forever for specific park projects, including reparation of the Victorian Bridge, renovation of the Nathan Frank Bandstand and re-lighting and renovation of the statues in the park. Private funds were used to landscape and re-grade the Rugby Field, install 30 new park benches, provide family picnic pavilions, plant hundreds of new trees and provide for emergency maintenance needs.

Master Plan Story

Education and outreach programs are key to Forest Park's future viability. To this end, Forest Park Forever established the Voyage of Learning Teacher's Academy to build teachers' skill in experiential and outdoor education, and promote an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum development.

Memory

In May of 1985 I graduated from college and moved to St. Louis. One of my co-workers organized a Fourth of July softball game in Forest Park. She invited a friend of hers named Scott from her college days. A few weeks later Scott and I started dating. A few years later, we married. Now our children, Griffin and Brennan, enjoy going to Forest Park, especially the zoo.

-- *Mary Henke-Reed*

1990 to Present

In 1995, the City of St. Louis adopted the Forest Park Master Plan to integrate the park's natural and man-made systems into a cohesive and mutually beneficial ecosystem. The goal of the Master Plan is "to create a total park experience" that stimulates the mind, body, and spirit, through a variety of natural, cultural, educational and recreational facilities, opportunities, and amenities. Most important, the plan was realistic and attainable.

Today, Forest Park is used by more than 12 million visitors a year. Hundreds of thousands come to participate in softball, cricket, rugby, tennis, golf, archery, lacrosse, and soccer. They also ride bikes, ice and roller skate, roller-blade, jog, fish and boat. An estimated half-million people attend special events such as the Great Forest Park Balloon Race each year and an additional half million patronize The Muny.

There are more than 14,000 trees in Forest Park, excluding those in the Kennedy Forest and at the St. Louis Zoo. Within Park boundaries there are a primary forest, a secondary successional forest and several fragile ecosystems.

The Master Plan for the rehabilitation of Forest Park is in progress. Phase I improvements are completed and cost \$94 million. Forest Park Forever has raised roughly half of the funds needed for the restoration through the "Restoring the Glory" capital campaign, and the City of St. Louis has committed the balance needed through public funding.

Master Plan Story

Today, the Forest Park renaissance is a model for urban parks throughout the country; it is essential that we remain mindful of its ongoing care. Forest Park Forever is dedicated to thoughtful, expanded use and to the Park's long-term viability. To achieve success, it is critical that every aspect of the Park be carefully and methodically maintained.

Memory

I'm now in my early 60s, but my two favorite childhood memories of Forest Park were riding Miss Jim the elephant and the fountain that kept changing colors near the Muny. When I got older, I enjoyed riding my bike in the park and especially enjoyed the water areas and especially the fountain that shot up so high in the air that it almost always had a rainbow. Now I'm excited to see all the work being done in the park to bring it back to greatness. I've traveled around the U.S. a lot, but never seen a park as big and beautiful as Forest Park.

-- *Norma Juracsik*