

P3 / PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Don't forget to attend our Depot Open House on Saturday, July 20 from 1-4 p.m.

P4 / WETLANDS

The Bass Lake wetland and other wetlands have influenced Park development.

P6 / DISPATCH LOOK-BACK

"Put the Creek back where it belongs!"

P6 / GUEST COLUMN

"Remembering with Affection the Old Grist Mill in the Valley," by Richard L. Kronick



REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

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Volume 18.2 / SUMMER 2019

THE CREEK AND THE MILL; THE LAKE AND THE SWAMP

BY BILL BEYER, FAIA

Summer is here, and we return to the cool, fresh waters of our past for some history, recreation, aesthetic relief and cooling off.

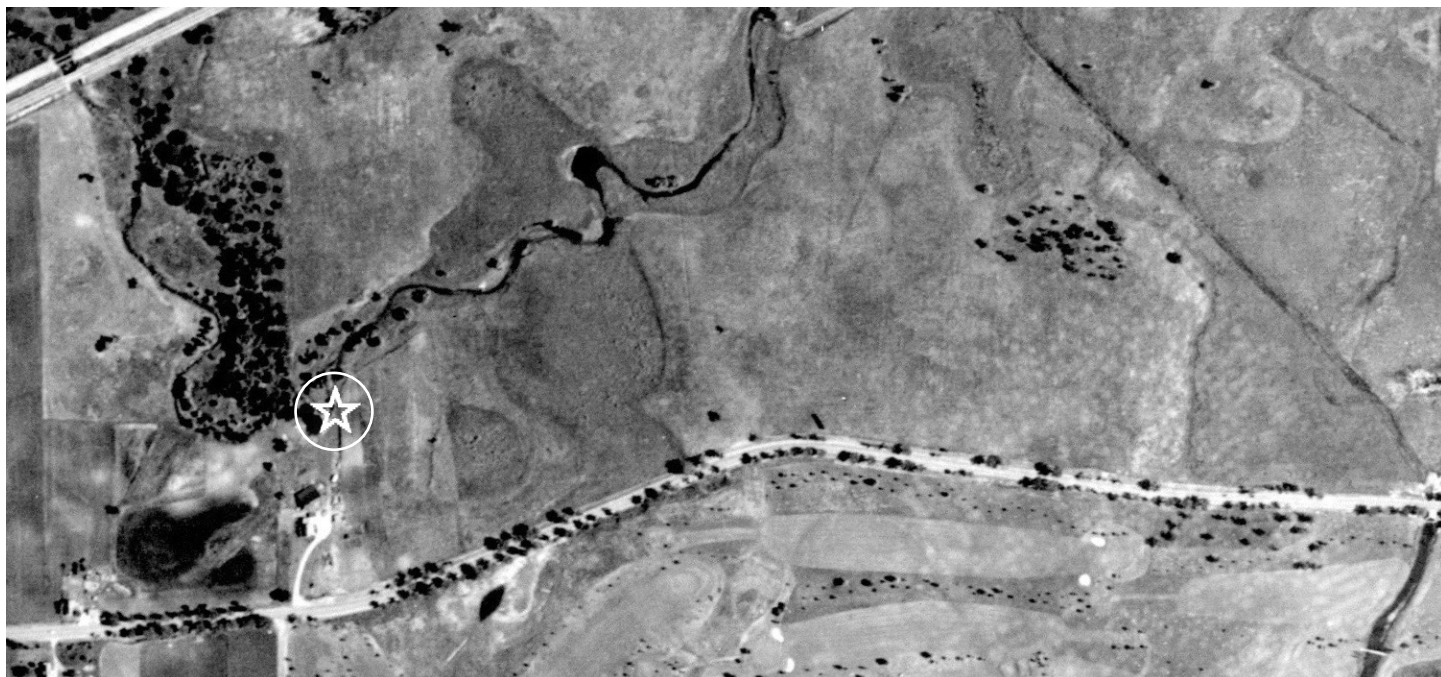
From the beginning, The Park has been blessed with water, but as settlers arrived in the area, the waters were seen as helpmates to power mills, as open sewers and garbage dumps to dispose of wastes, and as obstacles to be overcome - swamps to be filled or ditched and drained.

six times as it passes through, flatly for the most part. It drops about 200 feet from its source in Lake Minnetonka to the Mississippi, including the last hundred at the Falls, but only drops about ten feet on its lazy arcs through the Park. Harnessing the power of such a feeble gradient was apparently feasible.

The Globe Mill represented the first and only effort in the Park to harness Minnehaha Creek's water power, but lasted only 14 years under two different owners from 1874 until 1898.

Minnehaha Creek meanders in and out of our city at least

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This aerial photo (**) of the Globe Mill area from 1940 shows the straightening of Minnehaha creek near the future Methodist Hospital site, while faint traces of the mill pond, lower left, and the original meanders remain. Excelsior Blvd curves along Meadowbrook Golf Course at the bottom. The star indicates what we believe to be the approximate site of the mill building.

From Norman Thomas's unpublished history of St. Louis Park:

The only manufacturing activity in the area during the period was done by two mills, one...was known as the Globe Mill and was located on Minnehaha Creek in section 20. It had been built by William P. Day and his son Horatio N. who had come to Minnesota in 1849. The dam and mill were built in 1874. Four runs of stone burrs were installed in the mill which had a capacity of 125 barrels of flour daily. The builders found the mill unprofitable and sold it, by 1881 it was owned by the First National Bank...

The Day family shows up living in the area in the Territorial Census of 1875, listing father William, age 63, and son Horatio, 37, and their large families. The 1880 U.S. Census shows only Horatio, wife Mary, and eight children under the age of fourteen. A sad clue suggests a tragic ending to their milling lives, with Horatio listed as head of household, but also, as disabled due to "paralysis of right side."

Peter Schussler bought the mill in 1882 and ran it until 1896. After another dam and bridge were built upstream, we know he converted it to steam power. When Thomas B. Walker platted the core of his industrial suburb from 1890 to 1892, he had to work around the mill site, which was apparently not for sale. The surveyors, however, left a clue by carefully recording the meandering centerline of the creek, suggesting that the dam had been removed by then.

Norman Thomas, again:

The first we know of Minnehaha Creek...is in May 1822, when two 17-year old boys, William J. Snelling, the son of Colonel Snelling, and Joseph Renshaw Brown, a drummer boy from Maryland, followed the creek up to Lake Minnetonka. Snelling couldn't take the mosquitoes

and headed back, but Brown and two soldiers from the fort made it all the way, past Indian settlements, up to Gray's Bay and Big Island...they are thought to be the first white men to leave a record of having passed through the area...For years afterwards, the creek was known as Joe Brown's River; in 1853, surveyor Jesse T. Jarrett called it Brown's Creek.

In 1855, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published his epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, which became a riotous literary success worldwide. Longfellow had never seen Minnesota, the creek or the falls, but it didn't take a marketing genius to recognize the enhanced potential for attracting tourists to the scenic wonder. One can assume the name of the creek and waterfall changed pretty quickly from the dull "Brown" to the mellifluous laughing water of Minnehaha. And, who could resist the tear-jerker of Minnehaha's marriage to Hiawatha, so quickly followed by her death:

*He had brought his young wife homeward
From the land of the Dacotahs;
When the birds sang in the thickets,
And the streamlets laughed and glistened,
And the air was full of fragrance,
And the lovely Laughing Water
Said with voice that did not tremble,
"I will follow you my husband!"*

*In the wigwam with Nokomis,
With those gloomy guests that watched her,
With the Famine and the Fever,
She was lying the Beloved,
She, the dying Minnehaha.
"Hark!" she said; "I hear a rushing,
Hear a roaring and a rushing,
Hear the Falls of Minnehaha
Calling to me from a distance.*



By 1967, the Japs-Olson building covered the old mill pond, lower left, Methodist Hospital was in place on the far right, and Meadowbrook Manor housing had been constructed. The creek had been ditched and straightened to make the land friendlier for development. Louisiana Avenue had not yet been extended to Excelsior Blvd.

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Happy Summer!

It has been fun interacting with so many people over the past few months and sharing bits about our history. Each year, spring and summer provide many opportunities to learn from and share with local residents.

The season kicked off at the annual Children First Ice Cream Social on May 19th – a blistery cold day, but we were fortunate to have a table indoors. We did an activity where we simply had people mark which neighborhood in St. Louis Park they lived. What I took away from the event, besides knowing that the event drew a lot from Fern Hill, is that many people, children in particular, aren't aware of their neighborhood name. Did you know that in 1992, sensing a loss of community among residents, the City Council created a Neighborhood Revitalization Commission? From that initiative came 35 official neighborhoods (you can find them on the city website). Many, but not all, of the neighborhoods have Associations that plan local events.

Most recently, we were at the annual Parktacular event. I had the opportunity to share a brief history lesson with the incoming Ambassadors before they headed out on their annual scavenger hunt. I then was honored to be the guest speaker at the Kickoff Dinner where I shared some of the history of our railroads in Hopkins and St. Louis Park. On Saturday, our activity was asking people to vote for their favorite "iconic" landmark in the city. Top vote getters from this incredibly unscientific poll were the Roller Garden, Bunny's Tavern, and our Depot!

Our next big event is the Depot Open House on Saturday July 20th from 1-4pm. If you are in town, we hope you will join us to explore the Depot and enjoy some refreshments. In addition to our own members sharing the history of our local trains, there will be a representative from Southwest Light Rail who can provide updates on construction progress and plans for local stations. Also on hand will be a representative from Minnesota Operation Lifesaver sharing information about safety around railroads.

And don't forget, we aren't just celebrating the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. It's also 50 years since the Depot was designated to the National Register of Historic Places! More to come on how we will celebrate this milestone – just don't get your hopes up for more product promotions from the likes of Budweiser and Oreos.

Thanks again for your support, and please stop by one of our various events, office hours or open houses this year to say hi and renew your love for all things St. Louis Park!

Happy Summer,

Ted



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BASS LAKE AND THE SWAMPS

BY BILL BEYER, FAIA

When Jesse Jarrett surveyed the eastern quarter of the Park in 1853, he recorded a large swamp, with no open water, extending northeast past the western edge of Section 6, which was his finish line for the survey. The east edge of Section 6 would mark France Avenue, the eastern limit of St. Louis Park.

The survey showed an open creek outlet draining southeast to Lake Calhoun (Bde Maka Ska) and crossing the eastern edge of the section at about France Avenue and Excelsior Blvd. Jarrett did not record any open water, what would eventually become Bass Lake, at the center of that swamp. The survey also showed a large lobe of creek-drained swampland extending southwest into Section 7.

Bass Lake manifested itself as exposed surface water after 1871 when the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad cut through the swamp heading southwest, creating an earthen dam and effectively cutting off the northern lobes of the contiguous wetlands. The probable effect was to raise the water level. An 1896 USGS map shows the lake as open water; similar maps from the 1950s show it as a swamp.

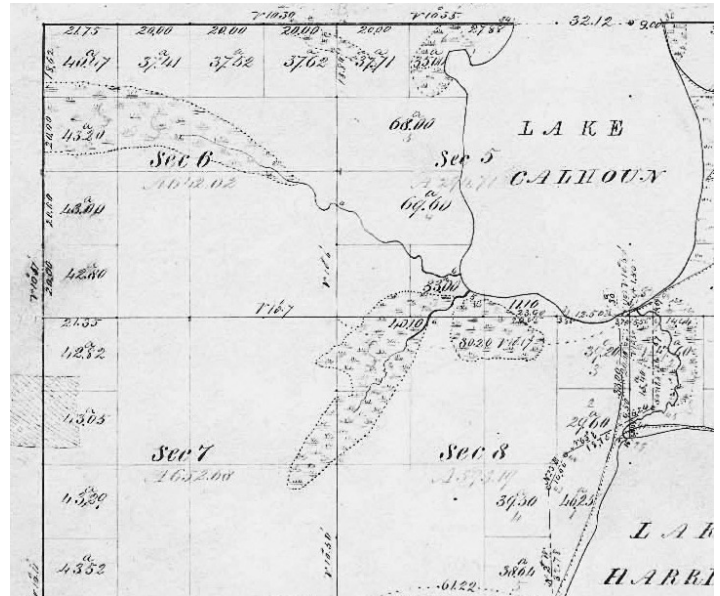
The Milwaukee Road pushed the landfill further south, completing its Bass Lake yard in 1913, with 27 tracks and capacity for 2,000 rail cars. The fill was obtained from excavations lowering the grade of its line across south Minneapolis; what is today the Crosstown Greenway. Construction of Highways 7 and 100 in the mid-1930s dumped millions of cubic yards more fill into the northern parts of the original wetland.

In 1883, the City of Minneapolis purchased 8.7 acres on the north edge of Bass Lake for a “quarantine station” for smallpox patients. Charles Hanke and Joseph Hamilton of the Town of Minneapolis (to become the Village of St. Louis Park in 1886) protested, to no avail. Maybe it was the taint of disease, but very early on Bass Lake was seen as a place for dumping garbage.

In 1908, County Ditch #14 was dug between Bass Lake and Lake Calhoun (Bde Maka Ska), paid for by assessing the owners of adjacent property. Between 1928 and 1960, the lake was drained again and again, each time re-filled by its nine natural springs.

After the lake was drained, it became an officially-designated dumping ground for concrete and other clean fill. There was a major effort to restore the lake in 1946, supported by citizens groups like the Sportsmen’s Club, but the Village threw up legal obstacles, saying the 1,000 households previously assessed for the ditch would have to be reimbursed.

A residents’ group fought to protect the lake from further damage, resulting in an anti-dumping order in 1969, supported by George Haun, then Director of Parks and Recreation for the city. Plans were made to restore the area, create hiking trails and raise the water level. The City removed silt in 1972 and



a student cleanup crew extracted garbage in 1976. An article from 1978 described the deplorable conditions that remained, and more clean-up proposals ensued. By then, the Westwood Hills Environmental Center was complete, so there was no move to create another wildlife area.

Today, the area is called the Bass Lake Preserve, a protected wetland. Owned by the city, management is regulated by the State Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. After 100 years of abuse, a citizens group called Friends of Bass Lake was formed to research the history of the lake and promote its preservation and possible restoration.

Over the years, that southwest swamp lobe in Section 7 was slowly drained, filled and occupied. Its remnants can be seen in the often-wet lowlands at the southwest corner

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of Lake Bde Maka Ska, in the sometimes-soggy playfields of Minikahda Vista Park, and along the length of 42nd Street through Edina to Browndale Park.

The boggy nature of the soils associated with these lobes of wetland manifests itself to this day. The new Bridgewater Bank at the corner of Excelsior and 36th/38th Street

straddles a small lobe of the original Bass Lake swamp. The building's architect tells us that the helical pilings required to support the building extend about 55 feet below its lowest level, or about 80 feet below street level.

The general contractor for a teardown and new house along the 42nd Street bottomlands at Grimes Avenue in Edina tells us that the helical piles to support the foundation had to extend 45-60 feet below basement level.



The approximate contour of the swamps taken from a 1901 USGS survey is traced over this aerial photo from 1940. The locations of the new Bridgewater bank headquarters and the new house on Grimes, both requiring deep pilings for foundations are starred. Bass Lake has been filled for the Milwaukee Road rail yards. The edge of Lake Calhoun/Bde Maka Ska is at upper right.

REMEMBERING WITH AFFECTION THE OLD GRIST MILL IN THE VALLEY

BY RICHARD L. KRONICK *

William P. Day built a grist mill on Minnehaha Creek in 1874 and named it the Globe Mill. The mill was just a few paces north of Excelsior Boulevard (then called Excelsior Road) and a few hundred feet west of the current location of Methodist Hospital. Day sold the mill to Peter Schussler in 1881, and from then until it was dismantled in 1898, it was known as Schussler's Mill.

Peter Schussler's son, Otto Schussler, became a medical doctor. In 1928, Otto published a memoir entitled *Riverside Reveries*. The title refers to the fact that Otto spent much of his career at St. Mary's Hospital, which overlooked the Mississippi River, directly across from the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus. Transformed by numerous expansions, remodelings, and name changes, St. Mary's is now part of the University of Minnesota Medical Center. Most of Otto Schussler's book is a recounting of his medical career. However, he reserved the book's last chapter for a sentimental recollection of growing up in his father's grist mill.

Otto claimed that "... nothing in the old days, and surely nothing in these degenerate times [he was writing at the end of the Roaring Twenties], was or is so well calculated to gratify the innate, aboriginal longings and desires of the average boy as was the old-time water-mill on the creek down in the valley."*

Otto rhapsodized about the sights, sounds, and smells of his father's mill, "with its dust spouts protruding through the wall, from which issued those clouds of white that gave the place its distinctive coloring and its unforgettable grist-mill odor." Then he wrote, with deep affection, about the mill's interior: "... there was semi-darkness caused by the paste on the window panes and the dust in the air. This, together with the deep, purring

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WHAT'S YOUR PARK STORY?

Do you have a St. Louis Park story to share with our readers? We would love to hear from you! We're looking for articles, stories, reminiscences and photos.

Submission Guidelines

- Articles are relevant to the St. Louis Park Historical Society audience; 1,000 words maximum.
- Articles are published at the discretion of newsletter staff and may be gently edited to accommodate space limitations.
- Submit your article to slphs.newsletter@gmail.com. Include your name, email address and phone number.

State Orders Homebuilder . . .

Put Minnehaha Creek Back Again

It doesn't pay to tamper with Minnehaha creek, an Edina homebuilder discovered last week when the state ordered him to put the creek back where it belonged.

George Speakes, who purchased three lots at 54th street and Zenith avenue, found that the creek, wandering through his property, would give him little or no front yard when his proposed house was completed.

By moving enough dirt to put a curve in the stream, he gained his yard yet returned the creek to its normal course as it left his property, said the state conservation department.

But, pointed out the state, such action requires a state permit and Speakes had no such permit. Thus, the home-builder was faced with the task of "restoring said stream to its original channel" before January 25, no mean task.

A similar diversion was accomplished without a permit several years ago, the conservation department admitted. But with present improvement plans for the creek, no such permission could be granted even if requested.



DISPATCH LOOK-BACK

Back in January of 1948, Dispatch editors seemed amused that an Edina homebuilder had got caught moving Minnehaha Creek around to improve his residential lots in South Minneapolis. The State told him to put the creek back where it belonged.

Meanwhile, over the past decade, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, in partnership with the City of St. Louis Park and Park Nicollet Health Services, has completed two separate, but connected projects to put Minnehaha Creek downstream from the Globe Mill site back to almost where it originally belonged.

Un-straightening the ditched watercourse, the projects aim to restore wildlife habitat, reacquaint the creek with parts of its original floodplain, and improve water quality. The Minnehaha Creek Preserve, completed in 2015, added 2,200 feet of boardwalk and 4,600 feet of paved trails to the Park Nicollet/ Methodist Hospital project, creating a new, stunningly beautiful recreational and natural amenity without parallel. The larger Minnehaha Creek Greenway project includes improvements and redevelopment west into Hopkins connecting to Knollwood Mall and Target back in the Park.



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rumble from the massive millstones, the rattle of wheat-cleaning machinery, the whirr and hum of fans and the slapping of belts, lent an air of mystery and danger to the place.”

Otto’s fondest memories were of the first time his father allowed him to approach and interact with the mill machinery: “What a happy, never-to-be-forgotten day was that for the inquisitive urchin when the old miller led him up to the whirring millstone, removed a small cover from a dusty spout and bade him reach in and get a handful of ‘chop!’ How eagerly, yet fearfully, he thrust his little brown hand into the dust-filled opening, and how startled and pleased he was when the hot, fluffy meal poured over it!” This remembrance was only topped by the next thing that happened on that first day in the mill. Otto wrote that his father “grabbed him by the collar of his coat and the patch on his pants and pitched him head foremost into the bran bin.” Apparently, Otto survived this experience and remembered it only with fondness.

Otto’s final thought about the mill was how eerily quiet it was when the machinery was shut down: “Something almost uncanny there was about that stillness. I do not know how to account for it unless it be true that a thick blanket of dust over everything serves to deaden all sounds, but certain it is that there is no other place in which the quiet is so deep and impressive as in a flour-mill at rest.”

Schussler’s Mill was dismantled in 1898 because a dam had been installed at the outflow of Minnehaha Creek on Gray’s



The SLPHS has no photos of the Globe Mill, but a visit to the historic mill site in Wooddale Park, Edina shows the excavated locations of the mill building foundations and the building’s relationship to the pond and dam. A similar set-up was likely for the Globe.

Bay in Lake Minnetonka. That pleased Lake Minnetonka residents but also reduced the creek’s flow rate to the point where it could no longer power the six mill sites that had dotted its banks. Schussler’s Mill was re-erected in LeSueur County; however, on July 9, 1916, it burned to the ground.

** All quotations are from Otto Schussler: “The Old Time Grist-Mill on Minnehaha Creek,” in Riverside Reveries, pp. 105-111, self-published in 1928.*

*** Aerial photos courtesy of the University of Minnesota Borchert Map Library online database.*