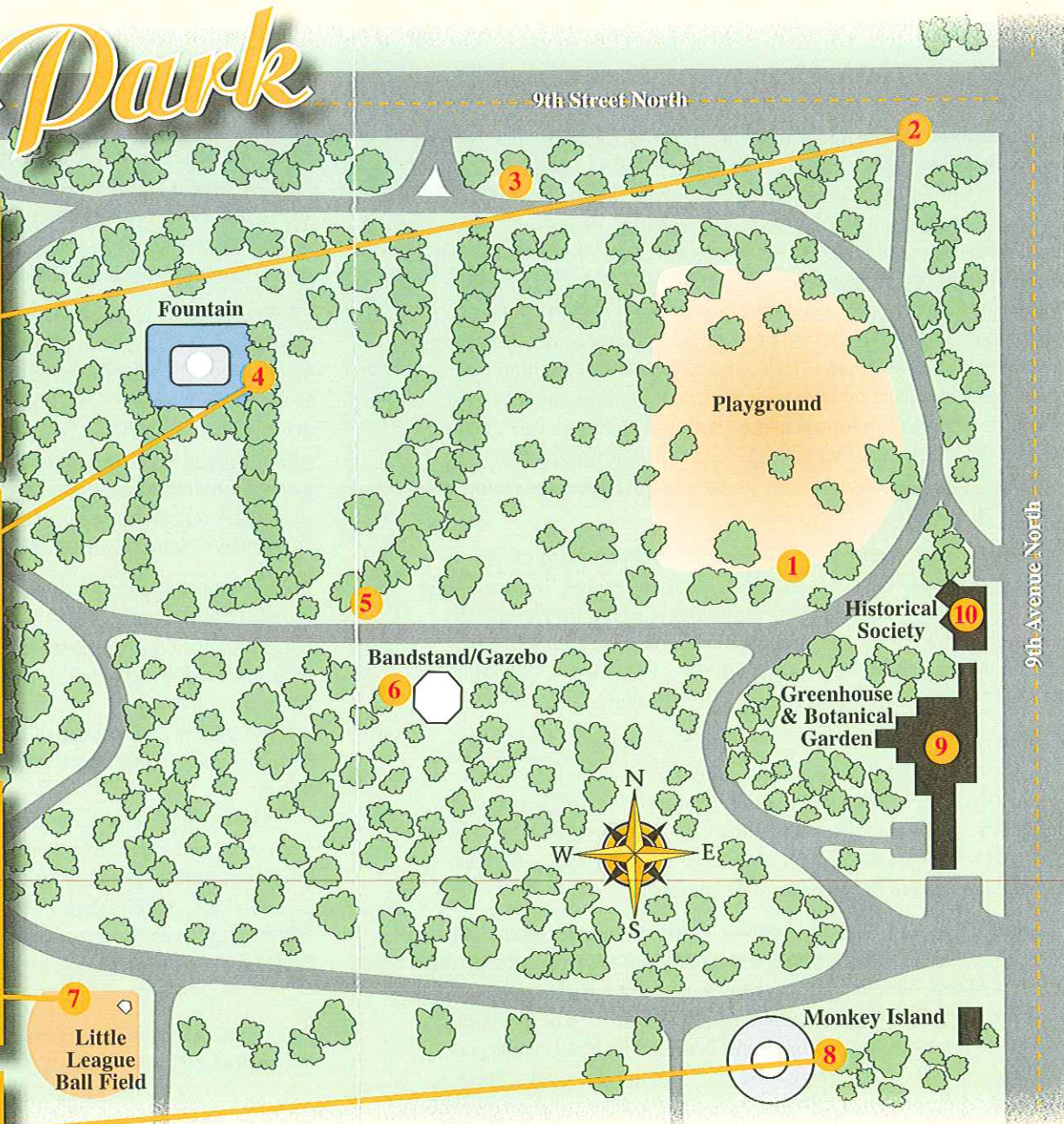
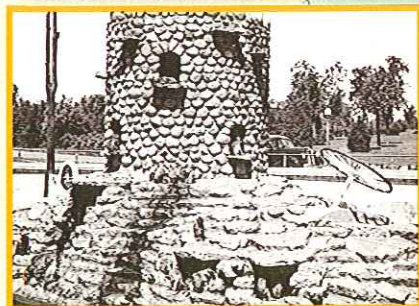


Oleott Park



7
Little League Ball Field

Take a walk through Oleott Park!

Oleott Park is now 100 years old! The park has changed a lot over the years, but it is still a wonderful place to spend time with your family. The monkeys, deer and bear are long gone, but many of the amazing structures are still intact. We hope you'll spend some time on our walking tour and appreciate the beauty of this grande old park! You can even check out the tropical Greenhouse and Botanical Garden or the Virginia Area Historical Society.

Oleott Park Historical Walking Tour

100TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY
OF OLCOTT PARK



Summer of Celebration 2011

100TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY *Olcott Park*

History

Olcott Park was named after W.J. Olcott, president of US Steel. The company first leased the 40-acres of land to the City of Virginia in 1905 for one dollar a year plus property taxes. In 1910, a 10-year lease was drawn and Olcott Park had its official opening on May 11, 1911. The city purchased the 40 acres of Olcott Park from the Oliver Mining Company on June 15, 1939 for \$9015.

In the past, there were large grassy pens for elk, moose, llama, buffalo, white-tail deer, beaver, mountain goats, brown, grizzly and black bear, timber wolves, coyotes, foxes, guinea pigs, cavies, black squirrels, red-faced apes and rhesus and ringtail monkeys. The city recreation department supervised and provided daily summer game and craft activities for children. There also used to be a Children's wading pool.

The Park currently is the home of Virginia's Land of the Loon Festival held the third weekend in June. It hosts a melting pot of artisans, crafters, musicians, entertainers and ethnic foods.

Points of Interest

1 Roman Fountain This was placed as a memorial fountain by Katherine Roman in memory of her husband, Joseph, in 1929. Joseph was the original owner of the Rex theater downtown housed in the building that says "Roman Block". He was considered one of Virginia's most charitable persons. The fountain had four little cherubs blowing water out of their shells, three of which are currently in the greenhouse.

2 Original Gates – 9th Avenue North The original gates built at this site were made of wood. In 1916 they were replaced by stone pillars built by Carl Anton Johnson, at a cost of \$1995. The gates were expanded in 1941 with rock from the Mountain Iron quarry to have one gate for incoming traffic and the other for exit only.

3 Plaque – Virginia's First Cemetery Virginia's first cemetery was located on the site occupied by the Virginia Regional Medical Center. A new cemetery was platted west of Olcott Park, and contractors were hired to move the caskets. A few contractors, less

than conscientious, moved the headstones but left the caskets in the ground to be uncovered decades later during hospital construction.

4 Fountain/Rock Garden The fountain and surrounding rock garden were built by over 100 Virginians, including 70 WPA workers during the Great Depression. The fountain is hexagonal and made of stone. It is surrounded by a rectangular wall constructed of ornamental stone. The surrounding pool is 45 by 60 feet square. Steps of granite flagstone lead to the terraced rock garden. The walls of the rock garden were constructed of native cut granite and greenstone coping. Fountain water surges 30 feet into the air, highlighted in many colors that change form, like dancing fireworks. There are 360 variations per hour that are possible with its combination of colored floodlights and different sprays, all controlled automatically by rotary switches and an electric motor at the base of the fountain. The fountain was originally turned on August 16, 1937. It was necessary to have traffic policemen on the site to control the traffic.

5 Plaque – Park Central This plaque shows a picture of the flower garden designed by the city's first horticulturist, Gunnar Peterson, hired in 1926. It was a tribute to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It measured 20' by 30' and contained 1300 plants. Also pictured is the old school farm and superintendent's house – now the site of Virginia Regional Medical Center and Essentia Health Clinic.

6 Band Stand/Gazebo The first gazebo built was constructed of wood in the Victorian style. The second one was similar in style to the current one, but was raised with storage area underneath for park benches. On Sunday evenings in the summer the City Band gave concerts. The musicians were each paid \$5 per night. The current gazebo still hosts city band concerts in the evening in the summer.

7 Animal Pens and Sheep Mountain At the site of the current ball fields there used to be animal pens and a rock enclosure for housing the Mountain Sheep, built in 1935. Stone masons built a fairly large size rock house using native rock, built upon a knoll just east of the animal enclosures. The sheep came from Banff National Park in Canada. The last of the sheep died in January 1941. They all died of severe diarrhea, attributed to keeping these animals in too close quarters and inbreeding. They were not able to provide their natural habitat food supply, which lowered their resistance. In 1942, the sheep enclosure was converted into a rabbit pen, but in 1943 they had difficulty keeping the rabbits alive due to dogs, cats, kids and meat rationing.

8 Monkey Island Monkey Island was built in March 1935, with CWA labor and ERA assistance. It is 311 feet in circumference. The castle

had a room inside with doors and windows for the monkeys to come and go. Between the castle and the wall was a lake of water which the monkeys could not cross to escape. They had rope ladders, trees, boats and rafts to play on. In 1940 there were about 50 long-tailed, Ringtail Spider and Rhesus monkeys living there. They were fed bananas, apples, peanuts, melons and lettuce. In 1964, vandals started killing the monkeys as soon as they were put on the island. That was the last year that monkeys inhabited Monkey Island.

9 Greenhouse Our greenhouse is the only tropical Botanical Garden north of the Twin Cities, established in the 1930's. Every year it would host annual begonia and chrysanthemum displays. It is the home to large palms, ferns, hanging baskets and flowerpots, and hundreds of various types of chrysanthemums. In winter 12,000 plants were in view. In summer there were 40,000. It was used to grow 35-40,000 annuals each spring to plant in the various planters in the park and around the city. Greenhouse hours are MWF 7-11:00 am, Fridays, Saturdays 12-4:00.

10 Historical Society The original park superintendent house, moved to this location in 1916, is home to the Virginia Area Historical Society and Heritage Museum since 1994. The museum includes the original house, a Depression era tourist cabin and a Finnish log house.

Permanent exhibits depict logging and lumbering industries, Virginia fires of 1893 and 1900, and the interurban electric railway system.

The museum hosts ever-changing displays of historical items donated by citizens past and present of the city of Virginia. World War II memorabilia will be on display through mid July 2011 in the main building, with other historical displays in the tourist cabin and Finnish log house. Hours of operation in the summer are Tuesday-Saturday, 11-4, winter hours are Thursday-Saturday, 11-4.

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Donations Accepted at

Virginia Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 736, Virginia, MN 55792, or

The Virginia Community Foundation
519 Chestnut Street, Virginia, MN 55792
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