

LOWELL PARK.  
TO BE DEEDED TO THE CITY OF DIXON, ILLINOIS.

PRELIMINARY REPORT

BY

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BROOKLINE, MASS.,

25th March, 1907.

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(a) GOVERNMENT OF LOWELL PARK.

The government of Lowell Park should consist of a Board of Park Commissioners which should exercise general legislative and financial control of all park matters, and should act executively only through its President or specially appointed Committees.

The direct management of men and teams and materials should be left to the Superintendent of Parks.

Duties of the Park Commissioners:

Aside from the duties of the Park Commissioners which are clearly defined by law or are well understood it is their duty to continually increase their knowledge and judgment on all park affairs but especially in the direction of esthetics, of gaining public confidence, of interesting the people in the park, increasing the income of the Board, of how to secure gifts of work and materials and of how to accomplish the most with the limited funds available.

No Park Commissioner should take upon himself any of the duties of the Park Superintendent except in rare cases of emergency. No Park Commissioner should employ or discharge a man nor give orders directly to the men under the Superintendent. No individual Park Commissioner should give orders to the Superintendent except in special cases by special vote of the Park Board.

As a rule, the policies and votes of the Park Board should be executed by the President of the Board acting whenever proper through the Park Superintendent.

Each Park Commissioner should learn whenever and wherever he can, by reading, by inquiry and observation, not only how all branches of park work should be done, but especially what things are in good taste and should be encouraged and what things are in bad taste and should be discouraged and prohibited. Good taste is a matter of culture. A practical working man who has had his mind on almost purely practical things from early morning until late at night, as is apt to be the case with such a man, is hardly likely to have

acquired culture, while a prominent citizen such as should be selected to be a Park Commissioner would be a man of cultured tastes. Hence such a Park Commissioner, although perhaps not previously familiar with the appropriate beauties of a park in the natural style, would quickly learn to appreciate them. He would then be able to advise at the Park Board meetings whether or not certain proposed things would be in good taste. He would be able to help by suggestions to the Park Superintendent — not by orders.

One of the most essential duties of the Park Commissioners is to elaborate, in advance, with the aid of the Park Superintendent, a detailed schedule of estimated appropriations for every class of items of expenditure that can be anticipated, leaving a fair proportion of the income for contingencies. This is a difficult and irksome duty and one which is very generally shirked or badly performed by Boards of Park Commissioners. In very many cases the absence of such a carefully prepared schedule results in what is little short of gross mismanagement of Park funds. Works are undertaken

which cannot be completed to the point of usefulness or beauty, or, if completed, it is to the exclusion of other much more needed works; labor is employed irregularly, with the result that the most intelligent and efficient laborers go elsewhere to get more steady employment, leaving only the ignorant, lazy, unambitious labor available. Few realize the great wastefulness of such haphazard, happy-go-lucky park management. Only by means of such a carefully studied schedule can the relative necessity and the feasibility of desirable things be determined wisely. It is not sufficient to limit the Park Superintendent to a safe monthly payroll. Everything on which the labor is to be employed should be included in the schedule, if the best results are to be obtained at the least cost. Then, too, careful records of quantity and cost of each kind of work should be kept and studied with reference to securing the best results in quality and quantity for the money expended.

Duties of the Park Superintendent:

There should be a resident superintendent in Lowell Park. Until a house and barn can be provided on the Park, he may board in the neighborhood.

The most immediate and urgent duty of the superintendent will be the policing of the property. The moral effect upon visitors and upon those intent upon depredations of knowing that there is an active, physically strong and brave official constantly in charge of the property would probably be sufficient to prevent the worst forms of injury to the property without the necessity of arrests or fights of any sort. Yet it would be necessary that the superintendent should have the legal and physical power to make arrests and to enforce order.

Superintendent to be an Educator:

The proper policing of a public park is very different from the ordinary practice of city police. On a public park the idea of preventing crime by force

should be kept entirely in the background. The paramount duty of the park guard should be that of guiding and controlling visitors by gentle and inoffensive moral suasion. Much attention should be paid to aiding young people to have the kind of good time they properly should have in a public park with as little damage or even ordinary wear and tear and with as great a sense of freedom as may be reasonable. A proper superintendent on a park such as this should have the knowledge and inclination to tell visitors many interesting things about the animal and vegetable life of the park — not only about pretty birds and flowers but about insects injurious to vegetation; how earth-worms make the soil for turf and all sorts of object lessons. He need not be a lecturer or run the risk of boring people. By tact and discrimination he could help many to a better understanding and appreciation of the natural beauties of the park. Thus visitors will less often feel disappointment at the absence of monkeys and parrots; orchid houses and beds of cannas; speedways and hideously noisy merry-go-rounds.

The Superintendent should work.

Of course there will be much time when the superintendent can be doing what would ordinarily be considered "useful work." The direction in which his physical work would be most useful and valuable is that of preventing fires and of putting them out if started. He can keep fences in repair. He can pick up and dispose of papers and other unsightly litter at times when there is no laboring man employed to do it. He can prune dead wood in the trees, pick up and cart away fallen branches, dig gutters to guide storm water off walks and roads in emergencies, repair washouts before they get bad, propagate hardy shrub bushes and vines for use on steep, bare banks; trap holes that are damaging tennis courts, prepare rustic signs for designating localities, drives, etc., and for the guidance of visitors, take care of his horse or horses and lock the gates after dark. It may be that some people would say such a superintendent would be too expensive but such is not necessarily the case. Where there are few men to be com-

manded and little heavy construction work to be supervised and where the criterion is not continually how many dollars are brought into the treasury, the pay of a superintendent is often low relatively to intellectual and moral qualifications. One might expect a comparatively inexperienced but otherwise suitably equipped graduate of the forestry or of the landscape gardening course of a university to be willing to take such a position for a few years at a low rate of pay for the sake of the experience and enjoyment of it or for his health. Or, a more experienced man who has found himself lacking in some of the qualifications required for successful commercial enterprises or of a similar sort might cheerfully settle down in such a place, which, although the pay is small and many luxuries lacking, has much to interest and satisfy a lover of nature and of children.

It may fairly be objected that a Park Superintendent cannot work with his hands and at the same time command the respect and obedience of visitors in his capacity as a park guard. A man who is fitted

satisfactorily in the various directions indicated is not easily obtainable, but the effort should be to find a man who comes as near the ideal as possible. The pay of the Superintendent will use up so much of the appropriation that a separate park guard cannot be regularly employed. Few laborers, if any, can be employed the year round to do the little odd jobs and chores referred to. Hence the need of a Superintendent who will do work with his own hands.

WAYS AND MEANS.

The Annual Appropriation:

Next to the best possible government of Lowell Park, the most vital necessity is an annual appropriation. Anything approaching a scientific determination of the amount of a minimum annual appropriation would involve so much investigation of experience and practice and opinions in other cities as to be out of the question at this time. If the subject should be studied at all in detail it would be very quickly found that the amount which ought to be spent on the park every year would be far in excess of what the City Government would feel willing or even be justified in appropriating for the park. It is clear that the annual appropriation for this park must be a reasonable proportion of the annual tax levy of the City. The first thought of the proposed Park Commission would very likely be to ask for a round sum, say \$5000. The first thought of the Appropriation Committee of the City Council would doubtless be to accept that application

as a basis but to immediately cut it in two, partly as a matter of habit and partly to manifest a laudable exercise of judgment in favor of municipal economy. Experience has proven that a much more satisfactory way is for the City Council to adopt a permanent ordinance to the effect that the minimum for any annual appropriation for Lowell Park shall be one mill on the dollar of the official equalized valuation of all property in the City. That, we believe, would yield the Park Commission at present about \$1700 annually. To one accustomed to the improvement and maintenance of parks this amount seems pitifully small. A no more than fairly adequate annual appropriation for a public park of the size of this one, and much visited, and assuming it to be kept simple and as nearly natural as possible, would be at least ten times that amount. Nevertheless, a one mill tax is probably as much as the City of Dixon would agree to as a minimum. To obtain the best results with this small sum it would be essential that the Park Commission should be able to rely upon it so as to be able to make at least a three year contract for the services of a park superintendent, and to wisely determine a

schedule of maintenance and improvement appropriations.

Additional Appropriations:

It is to be expected, however, that the above annual appropriation will be supplemented by the City Council by special appropriations, often perhaps for specific purposes advocated by the Park Commission and likely to be appreciated by the public, as, for instance, a boat landing and shelter, or a ball field shelter.

Volunteer Contributions:

It is to be hoped and expected that citizens will contribute additional sums according to their ability and interest in the park.

Even those who feel unable to contribute cash may help very materially with their labor or materials. It is almost certain that it will become the duty of the Park Board to call for and organize and direct such public-spirited citizens. Upon Arbor Day, for instance, hundreds of people could collect and plant trees and shrubs in a needed border plantation, the ground having

been previously prepared by farmers and others used to that rougher and more laborious work. Later, but before the full heat of summer, there might be a "hauling bee" when people with horses and carriages could bring bundles of old hay or bags of lawn clippings or the spring raking up of dead leaves accumulated in some odd corner of their yards or if they have a suitable wagon, the winter's accumulation of stable manure and used bedding. Upon another holiday there might be a modification of the old New England custom of "beating the bounds," by which the needed repairs of the boundary fence could be accomplished. Upon another holiday a series of chopping and grubbing contests for the removal of dead trees or stumps might be instituted and if desired suitable prizes could be awarded. In this and other ways that will no doubt suggest themselves to an enterprising and patriotic Board of Park Commissioners, not only would needed work be accomplished at little or no cost to the small park funds, but the park would greatly benefit indirectly from the interest people would

take in it, and last but not least the people would be benefiting themselves in ways they might not fully realize. Hence it is important that the Superintendent or one at least of the Park Board should have the impulse, the practical ability and the experience required for interesting and organizing the people in the actual work of improving and maintaining the park.

(c) PRELIMINARY IMPROVEMENTS IN LOWELL PARK.

The improvements that will be required in the park, to fit it measurably for use by the public, cannot all be foreseen nor described in detail without a good deal of study and could not be put in the form of plans without the aid of a detailed topographical map of the ground, but some of the purposes to be accomplished can be stated, so that if park commissioners in charge of the park have a little more to work with but not enough to pay for surveys and plan and expert advice they may at least have some sort of guide other than that which they may be expected to evolve from their own limited knowledge and experience of rural public parks.

Park Woods should not be Pastured:

The boundary fences must be maintained. The park is in a farming country and cattle must be kept out of the park. It does not do to have cattle in public parks. There are many women and children who would be afraid of cattle and would not visit the park if they

thought they might encounter a cow even. Even if they should go the dread would detract too much from their pleasure. Besides, the filth and disorder due to cows and the flies and ticks which breed in connection with cows would be objectionable. But more important by far than these objections is the damage which the grazing of cattle does to plant growths, in woodlands especially. They would let the coarse, ugly objectionable weeds grow but would eat up most of the beautiful, delicate and valuable wild flowers, and most of the bushes all over the park, if the cows are numerous enough and in parts of the park even if there were only a few. But more than that, the pasturing of woods results in the death of many trees, the partial death and decay of others and a general stunting and slackening of the growth of others. These extremely objectionable results follow grazing in woods owing to the destruction of the undergrowth. With the lessening of the undergrowth the sunlight is let in on the ground, the hot, dry prevailing winds of summer, especially the prevailing southwest wind, is permitted to play freely along the

ground and dries it up much more rapidly the less undergrowth there is. The early drying of the soil in spring quickly checks the new growth of the trees and the continued drying during the summer kills branches here and there and in many cases finally kills the trees outright.

Tall-trunked woodland trees are much more susceptible to the drying of the soil than are low-branched broad-spreading trees, because most of their roots are close to the surface. This is especially true of the older trees which are therefore usually the first to die.

Then too, undergrowth in woods tends to hold the fallen leaves from blowing and washing away and by accumulating they serve as a mulch to protect the ground and tree roots from drying and by gradually decaying supply a leaf mould which is very valuable in improving the soil by chemical processes which it is unnecessary to go into.

Finally, the undergrowth and its decaying leaf mould serve to prevent the valuable topsoil from washing away, and cause a great deal more of the rain which falls to soak into the soil by retarding its flow on the surface so the trees get far more good of the rains, especially in late spring and summer. Pasturage is

injurious to woods in another way, which is by preventing the reproduction of the trees. Ordinarily seeds from the trees supply a large proportion of the undergrowth. When the old trees die from any cause there are plenty of young ones ready to take advantage of the increased sunlight and air to grow up rapidly to take the place of the dead trees, but in a pastured wood this process is more or less completely prevented because the cattle eat and destroy the young trees, hence it is only a question of time when heavily pastured woods will become thin and eventually disappear altogether.

#### Toilet Accommodations:

Those who are responsible for inviting the public to an out-of-town park should see to it that adequate and neat ( even if cheap ) toilet conveniences are provided. The main difficulty is to ensure cleanliness and decency. The most practical way to do this, if it can be afforded, is to attach them to a resident superintendent's house. Until this can be done an arrangement might be made with some man working in the neighborhood to visit the place daily or twice a day during the season and perform the usual janitor work.

Park Shelters:

There should be two or three good sized shelters to which visitors to the park can resort in case of rain. Showers often come very suddenly in summer. It would probably be well at first to have two shelters, one in the form of a carriage shed in the upper part of the park, and the other a pavilion at a boat landing near the southeast corner of the park. Later a pavilion will be needed in the open space near the ball field in the southwest corner of the park, and still later another shelter will be required in the woods in the north half of the upper plateau. These shelters should be simple yet substantial and picturesque, but without ornamentation. They should be rather dark in color so as to harmonize with the woods.

Wells:

A drinking water supply should be provided at or near each of the suggested shelters. At the shelter on the hill an ordinary stone walled well would probably be the only economical method of supply. At the pavilion by the river a driven pipe well would answer

and would be cheaper. The wells should be so located in reference to the carriage shed and to the pavilions as to avoid danger of contamination.

Picnic Places:

Certain spots should be specially prepared for picnic places. It would be very ruinous of park beauty to let each picnic party locate where it pleases, trample out wild flowers, break down bushes, and all fires where they could easily spread, near water-courses to the wells and public toilet houses and the like. Picnic places should be attractive, not too sloping, shady, conveniently near a regular park walk leading to a park shelter, toilet house and well. Some should be suitable for parties arriving by carriage; others for boating parties. Some should be near the ball field; others where distant views may be commanded. At some there may be single rough plank tables and benches for a large party, with shelter and cooking arrangements like an Adirondack camp. In others, a few hewn logs and level-topped stumps and a few stones for a tiny fire for heating water for tea or coffee would suffice. Fagots, made

From limbs of dead or dying trees too small to be saleable as cord wood, may be supplied at a trifling price, or may be free in order to discourage raids on the neighboring trees and bushes.

### Fire Guards:

As a measure of ward against fires sweeping through the woods, to their root and lasting injury, certain irregular strips, winding through the woods, should be kept free from any combustible material. The "cleaned up" strips may be called fire guards. Their location should depend partly upon the topography, partly upon the existing distribution of trees and undergrowth, partly upon the desirable routes for drives and walks and partly upon esthetic requirements. The fire guards should be of different widths. Probably the widest fire guard would cross the Park from West to East, following the main ravine about the middle of the Park. Means for fighting wood fires should be kept at various convenient points in the park and farmers and others living in the neighborhood should be organized into a volunteer force to turn out upon

hearing a bell or other suitable alarm.

Border Plantation:

For the preservation of the western and southern borders of the woods, it is essential that a border plantation should be established. This border should be composed of trees and bushes that will best withstand the hot dry southwest winds of summer and the cold dry northwest winds of winter. At the same time this plantation should be laid to resemble the natural woods as closely as practicable.

Drives and Walks:

Drives and walks are, from the standpoint of landscape beauty, ugly and undesirable, yet in so large a park and considering its topography and woodland character, drives and walks must be conceded to be necessary. If carriages are to be admitted to the park at all it is only reasonable that suitable ways should be provided for reaching one or more of the fine view points; for passing through the beautiful woods; for

reaching favorite picnicking places, for getting to and from the attractive bottom land, and for near views of the river. In proportion both to the number of visitors benefited and to the money available, drives in this park must be considered an expensive luxury. For some years, and until accommodations for those who after arriving at the park are willing to go about on foot have been provided, carriages should be allowed only on one short drive from the entrance to a sitting place. To prevent carriages from being driven elsewhere it may be advisable to fence off a small portion of the park for their use.

Walks are more necessary in steep and wooded places than on level or gently sloping ground and in parts of the park where there is a good greenward. It is probable that there will be need of two or three graded walks to connect the high plateau portion of the park with the bottom land and river bank.

Both drives and walks should be as little artificial looking as practicable, particularly in the woods and on steep slopes.

(d) THINGS THAT SHOULD NOT BE DONE.

In general, it would be in bad taste to artificialize this Park any more than is required for the convenience of the public in using it.

Practically nothing that is ordinarily considered gardening or landscape gardening should be done. It would be safer to refer to all improvements and maintenance as esthetic forestry. There should be no formal flower beds, no garden flowers and no garden shrubs, except in an enclosed yard next to the Superintendent's residence. No buildings, fences or other structures should be whitewashed or conspicuously colored. They should blend with the woods -- not contrast with them.

No extensive Tree Cutting:

Trees should not be cut except for necessary constructions, in three or four places for opening distant views and except for good reasons of esthetic forestry, and in no case in sufficient numbers to alter the general character of the woods.

The undergrowth should not be removed except

on limited areas and for necessary purposes, such as fire guards, picnic groves, etc.

There should be no cobblestone or other conspicuously artificial looking paving for gutters, brooks or open drains. There should be no river bank wall, or stone pitched river bank.

There should be no so-called ornamental "rustic work."

There should be no cast iron or cement concrete ornaments of any sort.

There should be no statues or monuments or formal fountains.

There should be no wild animals in confinement nor exotic animals allowed at large.

There should be no race track or speedway for horses.

There should be no building for museum, educational, amusement or any other purpose not primarily incident to the outdoor uses and purposes of the park.

There should be no building or enclosure to which, or to any part of which, any charge for admission is made.

There should be no electric or other railway within the park.

In conclusion, this Park is well adapted to be and should be used as a nearly natural forest reservation. No ornament or anything else should be put in it for its own sake but merely as an aid to its proper use and enjoyment and its economical maintenance. The only exceptions of importance to this rule would be a field or two, where few or no trees now exist, for various ball games; a few arrangements for other simple, outdoor games; a moderate area of land that is now devoid of trees, to be enclosed and used for vegetables, hay, etc., for the partial support of the park employees and horses and perhaps to yield a small income toward the expense of maintaining the park.

Respectfully submitted,

Olmsted Brothers,

Landscape Architects.