

JENS JENSEN  
AND THE RACINE, WISCONSIN PARKS

A THESIS --  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

BY  
CHRISTINA SLATTERY

ADVISER - MALCOLM CAIRNS

\* BALL STATE UNIVERSITY  
MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 1994

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## ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Jens Jensen designed parks in Racine, Wisconsin are significant examples of his characteristic Midwestern style because they successfully integrated conservation, aesthetics and recreation into a native landscape.

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Jens Jensen was a prominent landscape architect whose designs emphasized the unique landscape features of the Midwest. As a strong advocate of conservation, Jensen used native plant materials and forms to express the vanishing Midwestern landscape. Jensen was a true artist and is most often recognized as the master of this uniquely Midwestern style. In 1905 he was employed by the city of Racine to design a system of parks. Racine's mayor had recently appointed a Park Board to consider the future recreational needs of the city and citizens, which at the time had only Mound Cemetery as a place to spend Sundays and holidays. From 1906 to 1914, Jensen completed plans for an entire park system for Racine, including specific plans for four parks, a bathing beach and Monument Square. The natural resources of the city were suited to Jensen's prairie style, and he emphasized the conservation and utilization of the Root River, shoreline of Lake Michigan, woods and meadows strongly in his work. The designs are unique because they successfully integrated recreational facilities into the aesthetic setting of a park. This paper will address the history, development and design of the Racine parks, emphasizing their local and national significance as surviving examples of Jens Jensen's philosophies and Midwestern style.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly growing industrial city of Racine, Wisconsin, civic minded citizens foresaw the necessity to set aside park lands for the benefit and enjoyment of both present and future generations. At the turn of the century almost all major cities in the United States had incorporated public parks into their development plans. Central Park in New York City, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and Calvert Vaux in 1858, was the first of the large pleasure parks in the United States and became the prototype that other cities emulated. In response to the overcrowded conditions and the spread of disease in the industrial cities, parks brought areas of fresh air and "healthy" countryside to all city residents. Park development in Racine, occurring as a local response to the national park movement, provided much needed leisure space within the city.

In 1905, the Racine Park Board hired the services of landscape architect Jens Jensen who served as designer and consultant for the city's developing park system actively through 1914. Jensen, an immigrant from Denmark, had been employed in the West Park District in Chicago and through his work had quickly earned the reputation as a park authority. The design of the Racine parks coincided with Jensen's tenure as Superintendent of the West Parks in Chicago where he was responsible for the redesign of the West Parks, the design of Columbus Park, and the development of neighborhood playgrounds. Two factors likely contributed to Jensen's hiring in Racine. First, Jensen was of Danish heritage, and the city of Racine's large Danish immigrant population probably encouraged and favored his involvement. Secondly, the city of Racine

was only about 60 miles north of Chicago, and many of the Racine residents would have been familiar with his work, either through firsthand visits or reports in the local newspapers.

The Racine parks were designed at a transitional point in the history of urban park design. Urban parks of the nineteenth century, such as Central Park, had been peaceful, pastoral settings providing open spaces for popular leisure activities. The naturalistic aesthetic of the designs were contributing elements to the success of these early nineteenth century\_ parks. Park designs changed as social reformers struggled to provide improved working and living conditions through organized social and physical activities for urban adults and children in the parks. Jensen was an active member in the national reform era movement and as an organizer of the National Playground Association initiated the inclusion of playgrounds in city centers. The Racine parks incorporated elements from nature and designs from the pastoral parks of the mid-nineteenth century as well as moving forward with the times to include playgrounds and increased recreational activities.

Racine was unique because its land was naturally suitable for park purposes. The parks, some of which Jensen himself advocated for protection, were rich in natural resources and beauty. The plans for Riverside, Island, and Washington Parks in Racine established an equal balance between the beauty of the natural environment and recreational facilities provided within. Through a balance of both needs Jensen's park designs in Racine demonstrated his beliefs in the conservation of the native landscape and the social responsibility of cities. From his studies of the Midwestern landscape Jensen wrote about and discussed prominent landscape features he observed, such as the prairie, the prairie river, and native plants. Jensen utilized these elements prominently in

his designs, believing that the landscape of an area should be conserved through designs using native plant materials and landscape compositions common to the area. The conservation of the native landscape influenced Jensen's designs as well as his concern in the public benefits of parks. Jensen advocated the provision of open space for city residents close to their home, because a park miles from their home would be inaccessible and of little benefit to them. Although his influence reached further than that of a prairie landscape designer into the areas of urban reform and conservation of the natural wilderness, he is most often remembered for his uniquely American landscape designs that developed a regional landscape style from and for the Midwest.

Riverside, Island, and Washington Parks in Racine are important designs of preserved the native landscape while incorporating the recreational needs of Jens Jensen; they serve as surviving demonstrations of landscapes which

the urban residents.

In a New York Times obituary Jens Jensen was called the dean of American landscape architects.<sup>1</sup> Although his work and contributions are widely recognized in the field of landscape architecture, it was not until recently that they have been documented. The first text to examine Jensen and his work was Leonard K. Eaton's, Landscape Artist in America: The Life and Work of Jens Jensen in 1964, with the second and only other text by Robert E. Grese, Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens in 1992. Both these books and many articles provide ample discussion of his life and formation of design principles, but outside of the West Parks in Chicago many individual park designs remain to be discussed. Regretably, many of Jensen's projects have not received the recognition and evaluation that they justly deserve. The Racine parks are included in this category. Eaton's text included a brief, yet

positive look at the Racine parks: "Racine has as fine a park system as any city of its size in the United States," and "these parks are a tribute both to Jens Jensen and to the enlightened civic consciousness of the citizens of Racine."<sup>2</sup> This project is timely as Jens Jensen and his designs are receiving a wider national recognition. Many of his works have been established as historically significant landscapes. Recently the West Parks in Chicago have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and restoration efforts of many of Jensen's design features are being completed in Columbus Park by the Chicago Park District.

The focus of this project will be the history and development of the early park movement in Racine focusing on Jens Jensen's involvement as landscape designer of the early parks. It will first be necessary to place the Racine parks in context with a discussion of *the* national public park movement and efforts in nearby Chicago which likely influenced the development of parks in Racine and Jensen's designs. This will be done in chapter one. Chapters two and three will provide biographical information on Jens Jensen and his career and discuss his philosophy of design. Chapter four will begin with a history of the efforts of Racine citizens to gain support for the acquisition of public park lands and the establishment of a Park Board. Chapters five through eight will be discussions of the individual park plans for Riverside, Island, Washington, and Lake Shore Parks, as well as Monument Square and North Beach. The study will conclude with a discussion of the national and local significance of the Racine parks. It is hoped that this introduction to the history and description of the parks in Racine will encourage extended recognition of the Racine parks as Jens Jensen landscapes and encourage efforts toward their future preservation and restoration.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PUBLIC PARK MOVEMENT: PLEASURE PARKS TO RECREATION PARKS

In the early nineteenth century American cities were rapidly expanding due to industrialization and the large influx of immigrant populations. As a result, cities became overcrowded and few vacant lots remained undeveloped in urban centers. Many residents could not afford to leave the city for a visit to the country and therefore they did not have access to open green space. Prior to 1858, large urban parks were unheard of in the United States. Rural cemeteries on the edge of town had provided open space and become unofficial park grounds used for picnics and strolls. The rural cemetery movement was initiated in 1831 with the design of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston by John Notman. Prior to that time, cemeteries within the city limits had become overcrowded, emitted unpleasant odors, and were believed to be spreading disease. So to alleviate the sanitation and aesthetic problems of the urban cemeteries, the burial grounds were moved to the outskirts of the city, or the country where unlimited space was available. The design of these rural cemeteries emulated principles of the pastoral English landscape garden, emphasizing natural features by using water, asymmetrical plantings, and curvilinear paths. Rural cemeteries became more than burial places and were the first parks and open spaces in which urban residents relaxed and spent their Sunday afternoons, thus demonstrating the need for parks. As a popular

form for cemetery designs of the nineteenth century, the rural cemetery influenced the form of the first public parks.<sup>3</sup>

The benefits of public parks were promoted by landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing:

Parks are better preachers of temperance than any temperance societies, better refiners of national manners than any dancing schools, and better promoters of good feeling than any lectures on the philosophy of happiness ever delivered in the lecture room.<sup>4</sup>

Promoting public parks was the common cause of both social reform groups and citizens concerned with civic pride. Social reformers were convinced that parks would improve the mental and physical health of city residents, as they were pieces of the country brought into the city, supplying fresh air and spaces for physical exercise. Parks, as "lungs for the city," were endorsed by health professionals, including Dr. John H. Rauch, who spoke on the issue and published a pamphlet, "Public Parks: Their Effects Upon the Moral, Physical, and Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of Large Cities" in 1869. Dr. Rauch discussed the role of trees in the protection of people's health through their consumption of carbon dioxide and the prevention of the spread of cholera and malaria. Dr. Rauch reasoned that: "parks also provided an opportunity to escap from everyday pressurf?.S, to \_ relax, and to be pr9tected from the corruption of the city...<sup>5</sup>

Central Park in New York City was the first park developed to test such theories. Through the efforts of Andrew Jackson Downing and William Cullen Bryant, land was acquired in New York City for a park in an unsightly area on the edge of town. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and Calvert Vaux won the design competition for Central Park in 1858 with a plan that expressed the features of

the country and kept the city outside park boundaries. In The Park and the Town George Chadwick described the plan for Central Park as follows:

The Olmsted design, as its name [Greensward] implied, was based upon large open meadows and lawns, backed by border planting of native material, natural features being kept and emphasized as necessary - but apart from considerations of style, the park was also based on a very real assessment of the part it was to play in the life of New York and the development of the city.<sup>6</sup>

Central Park was more than a simple pastoral landscape because it offered a variety of experiences, including an arboretum, formal areas in the mall and flower garden, cricket ground, parade ground, and several playgrounds. Central Park was also highly regarded for its separation of the circulation systems: footways, bridal paths, and carriage drives within the park. Olmsted was a reformer and believed that the parks could provide grand benefits to their users. He believed that nature had psychological effects on people and their psyches, and therefore parks could bring more than relaxation to urban residents by responding to human needs. Olmsted also advocated parks as democratic places for all social classes to meet equally and benefit from the recuperative effects of nature. Olmsted was a designer, but he was more accurately described in Victoria Post Ranney's Olmsted in Chicago as:

... more than an artistic arranger of landscape. He was a social and scientific planner of a broad scale who believed he could change the whole moral and cultural level of our democracy by careful planning of the environment.?

The park movement rapidly spread across the country following the example and overwhelming success of Central Park. The Scientific American called the park, "an enterprise which we advise every city in the country to imitate," and the editor of the Horticulturist reported in 1859 that parks were "the great features in all cities of any importance."<sup>8</sup> It was believed that a great city had public parks and in order to be a great city, public parks became a



necessity. H.W.S. Cleveland stated that after the development of Central Park other major cities were:

becoming conscious of their deficiencies, and are beginning to realize that a park must be regarded as a necessity rather than a luxury ... New York has set a fashion in the Central Park and her sister cities perceive that it became her, and so, forsooth, they must adorn themselves in like manner, or try to eclipse her by a more costly decoration.<sup>9</sup>

Andrew Jackson Downing termed the increased interest as "parkomania," and it quickly swept the nation as Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Hartford, and Detroit had all begun public park development by 1861 and the movement spread across the country with Chicago's efforts beginning in 1869. <sup>10</sup>

The early period of park designs, following Olmsted and Vaux's example, included picturesque settings for recreation and relaxation. The park brought nature into the city and created a restful location for contemplation and also provided recreational spaces. The pleasure parks typically included winding paths and drives, formal and informal plantings, and recreation facilities all in a natural pastoral setting. Olmsted and Vaux's park plans had included places for active recreation, including a cricket field in Central Park, but primarily parks were still being used for more passive recreations such as strolling, riding, and picnicking.

Changes in park designs began at the turn of the century as the recreational and functional needs of the parks began to overshadow the natural aesthetics of park design. Parks were expected to provide spaces for more activities, including athletic fields, dancing, swimming, crafts, pageants and even branches of the local library. The playground movement also encouraged the development of many smaller parks, often near schools, so all children could have open space and play equipment near their home.<sup>11</sup> In 1906, the Playground Association of America was formed to encourage recreational

facilities for all children near their homes, and Jens Jensen, as one of the national founders of the association, supported the idea that there should be a park within walking distance of every city resident. Smaller recreational facilities replaced the large urban pleasure parks that had their roots in the late nineteenth century. Park plans and development primarily focused on recreational facilities, with less importance to the preservation and appreciation of natural features and scenic areas.

## THE CHICAGO PARKS

Chicago followed the examples of New York City and others, and in 1869, the legislature of Illinois passed a bill allowing the city to establish public parks. The bill allowed for six large parks connected by a boulevard system expanding the area of Chicago's parks from less than 100 acres to over 1,800 acres.<sup>12</sup> As soon as the land was surveyed and acquired the designs for both the West Parks and the South Parks were begun.

In Chicago working on the plans for the suburb of Riverside, Frederick ... Law Olmsted, Sr. and his partner Calvert Vaux, were commissioned to design the South Parks: Washington, Jackson, and the Midway Plaisance. <sup>13</sup> The topography of the land for the South Parks was very flat and unassuming, containing swampy sand dunes in the lower area and a flat prairie in the upper area. Olmsted and Vaux wrote:

the fact should be recognized that none of the sites and no part of any one of the sites which have been reserved for parks at Chicago would generally elsewhere be recognized as well adapted to the purpose. <sup>14</sup>

Olmsted and Vaux's plans used the existing flat landscape to create large meadows, "rambles and open grounds [that] offered solitude," with "pavilions, boulevards, promenade terraces provid[ing] a pleasant setting for the crowd." 15 Olmsted and Vaux created from the flat undesirable landscape a rural pastoral park setting with spaces for both active and passive recreational activities. 16

The development of the West Parks began in 1869, the same year as the South Parks, with a survey to identify possible park lands on the west side of Chicago. The surveyors, Alexander Wolcott and Edward A. Fox, found little land naturally suitable for parks, as had also occurred on the south side, and expressed their opinion of available land:

It would seem at first glance to be a difficult if not impossible undertaking to transform this flat, treeless, uninviting prairie into a pleasure ground that should possess those attributes of picturesque variety and beauty that we are accustomed to associate with the name of ... public parks.<sup>17</sup>

Lands for the West Parks were never the less chosen, and in 1870 William LeBaron Jenney was hired to design the parks and boulevards.<sup>18</sup> In the park designs, curvilinear carriage drives and pedestrian paths, informal plantings and a dominant body of water were characteristic features. Implementation of the plans was hindered by the Chicago Fire of 1871, leaving many improvements incomplete, and the park land deteriorated from neglect.<sup>19</sup>

In 1905, Jens Jensen was hired as Superintendent of the West Parks, and it was his responsibility to rehabilitate the three largest parks: Humboldt, Douglas and Garfield. Jensen added to the system with the design of the new Columbus Park in 1916, as well as introducing playgrounds, neighborhood parks, and recreation centers which he strongly advocated.

The designs of both the West Parks and the South Parks were completed before Jensen's arrival in Chicago. The park's early plans may have provided

valuable lessons for Jensen in his future design career. The flat topography of both park systems allowed for an emphasis on prairie and open space, representing the Midwestern prairie landscape that Jensen came to love and incorporated into his designs. The South Parks especially combined the conflicts of the American park with both the preservation of a natural area and a provision of recreational spaces. The unassuming lands of the West and South Parks, both initially seen as less than ideal park lands, were transformed into a system of parks that many American cities came to envy. Elements of design and the mix of contemplative and recreational uses within the Chicago parks were examples of successful park design that Jensen incorporated into his plans for the Racine parks.

The city of Racine, the second largest city in the state of Wisconsin at the turn of the century, developed public parks both as a necessity for its residents and to keep up with other prominent industrial cities. The examples set by New York City, Chicago and other cities likely influenced some members of Racine to support a system of public parks. For public parks not only provided recreational space, they also demonstrated civic responsibility.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BEGINNINGS OF JENS JENSEN'S CAREER

When Jens Jensen came to the United States in 1884 public parks were being established in most major cities and the profession of landscape architecture had been established through the work of Olmsted, Vaux, and others. With their design of Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux coined the profession of "landscape architecture" and also created the prototype for urban parks. Without a doubt the success of Central Park in New York City established a public park movement that swept across the country. Jens Jensen, arrived in the United States during this movement at the age of 24 without formal landscape design training and established himself as a prominent landscape architect.

During his youth, Jensen had attended folk school and Tune Agricultural School in Denmark where he had taken courses in botany, chemistry, and soil analysis, but there his training ended. Jensen and his wife, Anne Marie, left their native Denmark to separate from his family who had not approved of his marriage.<sup>20</sup> Upon his arrival in the United States Jensen had found temporary work on farms in Florida and Iowa, before coming to Chicago in 1886. As young immigrants Jensen and his wife settled in a Scandinavian neighborhood of Chicago near Humboldt Park, and he found employment in a local soap factory.

Jensen was unhappy working at the factory and found new employment outdoors as a laborer in Chicago's West Park District. Despite a lack of training and only one year of work in the parks, Jensen was promoted to foreman of

Union Park (1887). As foreman Jensen was given the opportunity to design and create his first landscape which he called an "American Garden." In a corner of Union Park, Jensen planted the garden with native perennials, trees, and shrubs, which contrasted with the formal gardens of largely nonnative plantings commonly located in the parks. Because the use of native species was unique many of the plant materials were unattainable in everyday nursery stocks, so Jensen and his crew were forced to collect plants for the garden from their natural environments.

The "American Garden" was successful and brought Jensen a promotion to park superintendent in 1895. Jensen served as superintendent for five years and then resigned on principle, refusing to participate in the political graft that was troubling the city and the parks. With his departure from the Chicago Park System in 1900, Jensen began to accept residential and public commissions in Chicago and in neighboring states.

The landscape design career of Jensen included public parks, residential designs and estates; institutional facilities, golf courses, subdivisions, and gardens in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Iowa, Ohio, Wisconsin and even Pasadena, California. Jensen is best known as a prairie landscape architect because his designs, largely in the Midwest, were inspired by and representative of the native prairie landscape: rich in native plant materials, open prairie spaces, and naturalized rivers.

Although he resigned from Union Park, Jensen's involvement in the Chicago Parks did not cease, as he became a member of the Metropolitan and Special Park Commission. The commission, formed in 1899, encouraged the establishment of a metropolitan park system for the city to replace the separate park districts. The commission reported its findings in 1904; Jensen was its

landscape architect, and he stressed the importance of the native plant communities at each park site.<sup>21</sup> In the following year, the park district rehired Jensen (1905) as the Superintendent and Landscape Architect for the West Park District. Jensen was responsible for the redesign of three large parks in the district: Humboldt, Douglas, and Garfield, as well as the design of the new Columbus Park and smaller neighborhood parks or playgrounds within the district. Jensen continued as superintendent through 1920 when he once again resigned because the park commissioners did not agree with his study and plans for the expansion of the west parks in "A Greater West Park System."<sup>22</sup> Although his career with the West Parks ended, Jensen continued his private practice and conservation activities.

Jensen was not only a designer of public parks and private estates, but he was also actively *involved* in *civic* reform efforts and conservation of the native Midwestern landscape. His *civic* involvements included membership in the City Club, formed in 1903 as "a social club with purpose," and as the chair of the committee on city planning from 1909-1912.<sup>23</sup> Jensen was also a member of "The Committee on the Universe," an informal dinner and discussion group, hosted by Dwight Perkins and attended by Jane Addams and others to discuss the "idea of making a comprehensive plan for parks within and without Chicago."<sup>24</sup> Jensen's other civic involvements included membership in the State Art Commission of Illinois, Municipal Art League, of which he was director, and the Chicago Architectural Club. In addition, he openly expressed his awareness of civic needs and problems in the many articles he authored during the period. For example, "Regulating City Building" (1911) and "Chicago Playgrounds and Park Centers" (1908) discussed the necessity of regulating city development and establishing city parks and playgrounds.

Jensen was very active in the reform era playground movement on a local and national level. As a frequent visitor to Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago, where the city's first playground was established, Jensen witnessed firsthand the benefits playgrounds offered to children.<sup>25</sup> To expand the efforts of Jane Addams to a citywide level, Jensen and Dwight Perkins organized the Chicago Playground Association in 1908. The same year, Jensen established the first neighborhood park in Chicago, Eckhart Park. The neighborhood park provided open space, often near the school, with play equipment and areas for games all within walking distance of a child's home. The playground movement was expanded on a national scale when Jensen and Jacob Riis, a social reformer and also a Danish immigrant, worked with Theodore Roosevelt to establish The Playground Association which crusaded for parks in all city centers.

Jensen's reform concerns extended beyond the needs of the rapidly changing urban environment to protect and conserve the surrounding natural resources that were threatened with potential development. He organized two groups to support his efforts: the Prairie Club and Friends of Our Native Landscape. The "Saturday Afternoon Walks" of the Prairie Club were formed to acquaint people with the natural beauty of the lands surrounding Chicago. Walkers were led on excursions by influential members of Chicago society to discover the beauty and the resources of the native landscape.<sup>26</sup> Friends of Our Native Landscape, formed in 1913, was the second conservation group Jensen formed and headed. Group members met four times a year to disseminate information on the unique landscapes in the state of Illinois and encourage legislation for their retention. In 1921, the group issued the report, "Proposed Park Areas in the State of Illinois: A Report with Recommendations,"



which stressed a plan for statewide parkland preservation and promoted the acquisition of park lands based on scenic quality, and not only on historical association, as had occurred in the past. A follow-up report was published in 1926, "A Park and Forest Policy for Illinois." Both reports and efforts by Friends of Our Native Landscape led to the acquisition of a majority of the recommended lands that eventually became a part of the statewide park system. Chapters of Friends of Our Native Landscape were also organized in the states of Wisconsin (1921) and Michigan (1924).<sup>27</sup>

At the age of 72, Jensen established "the Clearing" in Ellison Bay, Wisconsin. The "Clearing" was a "school of the soil" for America's youth to learn by experience and direct study of the landscape. The school, which would also later become his permanent residence, was sited in the wilderness of Door County, Wisconsin on the shore of Green Bay. Jensen had spent many summer vacations at the property and had hoped to move there on a permanent basis to escape the city, but his wife did not like the isolation, and it was not until after her passing in 1934 that he established full-time residence at "the Clearing." Jensen established classes at "the Clearing," for the purpose of new type of education he described in the following manner:

to clear away all the debris of the overstuffed learning, steeped in form and tradition, and to get to the source of all wisdom, the soil. It is a school of the philosophy of the soil... I started to (en]vision "The Clearing" when I saw how deep our youth were sinking into the mire of unfounded theories, unprincipled reasoning. It was then I realized that we must first give youth a basic beginning to [their] reasoning that can withstand all the pitfalls that higher learning, so called has to offer. 2s

The school and teaching became the focus of his life, and Jensen continued educating students until his death on October 1, 1951. The legacy of Jens Jensen and the "Clearing" continues through classes held there today.

## CHAPTER THREE

### JENS JENSEN AS DESIGNER: SIGNATURES ON THE LANDSCAPE

Jensen designed in the Midwestern style of landscape gardening. The uniquely Midwestern style of "natural" landscape design, commonly referred to as the "Prairie Style," shared its name with both literary and architectural movements of the same period in Chicago. Wilhelm Miller, a professor at the University of Illinois Agricultural School and leading promoter of the Prairie style of landscape architecture, defined its characteristics as the preservation of typical Midwestern scenery, the restoration of local color, and the repetition of the horizontal lines common to the landscapes of the region.<sup>29</sup> Jensen's landscapes demonstrated these prairie characteristics as well as other Midwestern landscape features including dunes, forests, and streams. Ossian Cole Simonds had begun *to* advocate a Midwestern regional style in his designs for Chicago's Graceland Cemetery beginning in 1878. Although Jensen was not the first to design in this Midwestern style, he is often remembered as the leader of the movement. Jensen may have been a more vocal spokesperson of the Midwestern design philosophy than his predecessor Simonds, but Miller attributed Jensen's recognition to the fact that the others were merely practitioners, while "Jensen was an artist."<sup>30</sup>

Jensen was committed to the expression of the native landscape: "through generations of evolution our native landscape becomes a part of us, and out of this we may form fitting compositions for our people...<sup>31</sup> By

designing in a natural style he created unique and distinctive landscapes characterized by a number of features which leave his signature on them. To those who know and understand the principles Jensen utilized in his designs, his signature can be discovered, but for the common visitor to a Jensen landscape it will often appear as a natural and untouched environment. His anonymity as a designer would not have bothered Jensen, for he wrote in

Siftings:

It matters little if the garden disappears with its maker. Its record is not essential to those who follow because it is for them to solve their own problem, or art will soon decay. Let the garden disappear in the bosom of nature of which it is a part, and although the hand of man is not visible, his spirit remains as long as the plants he planted grow and scatter their seed.<sup>32</sup>

Jensen discovered the Midwestern landscape on his arrival in Chicago and continued to explore it the rest of his life. On weekends, Jensen traveled the countryside of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin to explore, investigate, and learn about the native landscape. In Siftings, he recalled an early impression of the prairie during a train ride:

As I sat watching, I gradually began to feel a great force arise from these flat lands, and I knew that here lay something far deeper, far more powerful, than anything I had experienced before in the great outdoors.<sup>33</sup>

Jensen believed that a landscape should express its roots and heritage and not imitate a form that is unnatural to the area. For example, a Renaissance garden would not belong in the backyard of a suburban Illinois home, but a prairie landscape using native plant materials would be appropriate.

From his studies of the native Midwestern landscape, Jensen extracted four primary components to include in his designs: the prairie, native plants, water in the form of a prairie river, and the natural manipulation of space and light, utilizing restricted sight lines.<sup>34</sup> Jensen was careful not to copy these

elements directly from nature, but rather to express their essence, creating a complete Midwestern landscape appearance and experience.

Large open spaces reminiscent of the prairie were common staples in his designs. In an interview with Ragna Eskill, Jensen indicated that:

Sometimes I start with the open meadow as my keynote. I always have a clearing in every garden I design -- a clearing that lets in the smiling and healing rays of the sun. A sunlit clearing invites hope.<sup>35</sup>

Early plans labeled the open spaces as meadows, but as the spaces evolved and his designs emerged Jensen labeled these spaces "prairies."

Native plants, serving as identifying features of the landscape, were essential components in the creation of designs that expressed the Midwestern landscape. Jensen was careful that the placement of plants represented typical arrangements, and through a repetition of plant groupings in a natural arrangement an unity of design was achieved that represented the local color. Commonly used plants included bur oak, hawthorn, crabapple, prairie rose, and phlox. The hawthorn and the crabapple trees were distinctive in the prairie landscape, and Jensen used them as symbols. The low horizontal form of the hawthorn and crabapple led the eye across in a horizontal direction, similar to the flat landscape of the prairie (Fig. 1). The hawthorn, in particular with its low horizontal branches, became one of Jensen's favorite plants and is seen as his signature plant. Jensen stated in an interview:

One of the most vivid memories I have is my first view of a native crabapple tree. It was on the train coming into Chicago, and through the car windows I saw silhouetted against the sky the delicate rose of a wild crabapple in early bloom. And when I was told it was a native tree, I said to myself, "that tree is a symbol of the beauty of this prairie landscape we have been passing through. And it still is to me today -- it and the native hawthorn, whose gray horizontal branches are typical of the rolling lands of this mid-country."<sup>36</sup>

Water played a key design element in Jensen's plans and was often introduced in the form of rivers and pools. The use of water was based on the native prairie river that Jensen found to be characteristic of the Midwestern landscape. Water introduced or retained in Jensen's landscapes was represented in true or naturalized forms (Figs. 2 and 3). The shores of lakes and rivers did not become sanitized and were arranged or retained as natural muddy, marshy, and weedy shores (Fig. 4). As at Columbus Park in Chicago, small rivers engineered into the landscape appeared realistic with curves and bends hiding the river's true length and termination. The shorelines were often lined with stratified rock, imitating the dominant rock formations found along the Illinois River. Stratified rock was also used to control erosion along the banks of the rivers as well as on the hillsides (Fig. 5).

Jensen's designs also consistently used curvilinear paths and roads based on nature's forms. The curve as a shape or form was viewed as a natural element, while a straight perpendicular line, not found organically, was man-made. Curved drives and paths had been used in park and cemetery designs as a contrast to the perpendicular grids of the large cities which allowed for a change in mind set from city street to park road. From the example set by earlier designers, Jensen's designs used these curvilinear roads and paths that Grese suggested, followed the "topography, vegetation or some historical precedent that gave them meaning."<sup>37</sup>

Curvilinear roads and paths also served as a creative device to enhance views as well as manipulate spatial perceptions. A curve in the road limited sight lines and created a sense of mystery about the road's end or the actual size and boundary of the park (Fig. 6). At a bend in the road, Jensen often used a grouping of plants to temporarily block a view, often of an opening or

"clearing" which was slowly *revealed* as one *traveled* around the bend (Fig. 7). Through the use of extended views, Jensen also controlled spatial perceptions. The edge of an open space was curved, enhancing *the* perceived size of the space, creating the feeling of an actual prairie. Grese observed that Jensen "often oriented *the* meadow *with* major axes in an east-west direction so that *the* sunrises or sets at one end of the long space."<sup>38</sup> Plant groupings in the landscape created sequences of shady areas *that* opened into sunny areas, allowing for another manipulation of space in which viewers perceptions were also visually controlled. <sup>39</sup> Plant groupings were also carefully planned to screen out views of busy streets and outside disturbances (Fig. 8).

Lastly, council rings placed in the landscape were the most visible sign of Jensen's signature on a landscape. The council rings were simple circular stone benches often with a central fire pit sited in a woodland area or on the edge of a woodland border with a view or opening onto a central meadow. Jensen included his first council ring on "player's hill" at his earlier home, also named the "Clearing," in Ravinia, Illinois. Historically, the council rings were based on *the* communal campfire of the Native Americans and the pioneers. Council rings became an important feature incorporated into his park and residential designs to encourage the gathering of people in a circle for discussion or to commune around a campfire. As he stated:

Practically the ring brings people close together, and the fire chases away the mosquitos, so often an annoying hindrance to our enjoyment of the outdoors. From a spiritual standpoint, there is something within us that loves the fire, and gathering about it has a social leveling effect that puts us all on par with one another.<sup>40</sup>

The circular arrangement of *the* council ring evoked a feeling of democracy, and spoke of equality in an environment where all were equal. The equality and

democracy of the council ring embodied the same principle as arguments for public parks in which all citizens would be provided with a place to experience

nature and spend their leisure time.





Figure 1: The Hawthorn tree, Jensen's signature plant in Island Park.



Figure 2: Retained natural representation of the Root River in Island Park



Figure 3: Root River surrounding Island Park

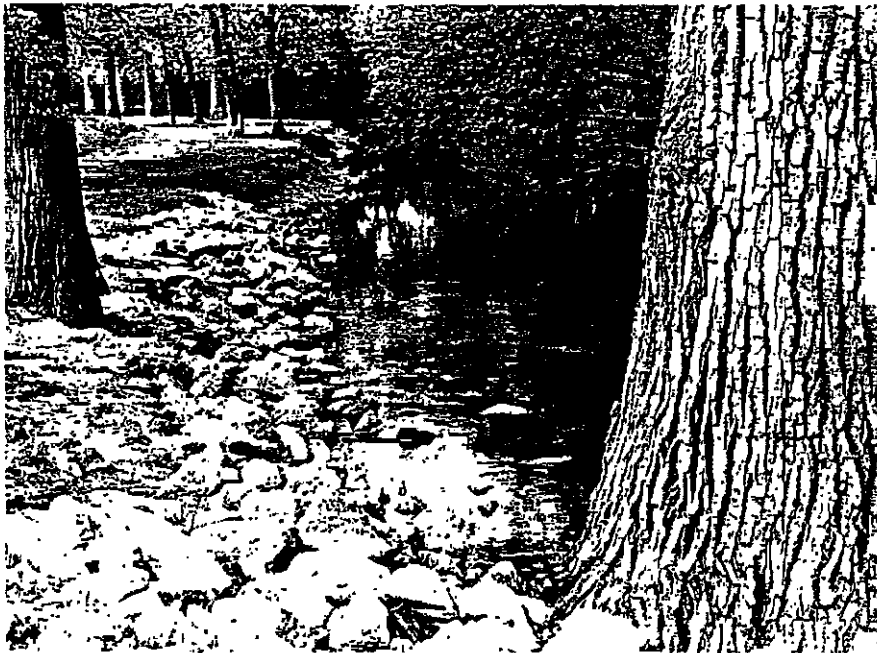


Figure 4: Shoreline of Root River surrounding Island Park



Figure 5: Stratified rock shoreline of Root River, Island Park



Figure 6: Riverside Drive winding through Riverside Park



Figure 7: Riverside Drive bending through island Park



Figure 8: Native plant grouping in Island Park screening surrounding buildings

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CITY OF RACINE

Racine, on the shoreline of Lake Michigan, is located in southeastern Wisconsin and is the largest city in Racine County with a greater population of 175,034 in 1990<sup>41</sup>. The first inhabitants settled in Racine as early as 1834 for its geographic location on Lake Michigan and the Root River (Fig. 9). The city was named Racine, from the French word meaning "root," in reference to the Root River that travels through the city and was filled with tangled roots. Surveyor's records of 1836 estimate that around 60% of what is now Racine was covered with woodlands and forest vegetation and about one-fourth of the area was prairie.<sup>42</sup> The land was originally heavily forested near the lake, with groves of oak, maple, and other hardwoods to the west of the lake.<sup>43</sup> The land was fertile for agricultural development as it was flat or gently sloping, well-drained and capable of a long growing season.<sup>44</sup>

The growth of Racine steadily increased and it was incorporated as a city in August of 1848. Racine became a manufacturing center in Wisconsin, second only to the city of Milwaukee, and produced goods shipped to various locations. From the mid to late nineteenth century many large industries were established in Racine, including J.I. Case, manufacturer of threshers, S.C. Johnson, manufacturer of floor wax, Racine Woolen Mills, Horlick Malted Milk, and Racine Iron Works. By 1890, the population of Racine had reached 23,840, with 4,200 of those people employed in the factories.<sup>45</sup>

The population of Racine increased with the influx of immigrants from areas such as Germany, Ireland, Scandinavia, and England. In 1890, the city of Racine was still divided into ethnic neighborhoods, with specialized services catering to their residents. The Danish were the largest immigrant group in Racine, and by 1905, the city had the 'greatest per capita concentration of Danes of any city of the world outside of Denmark itself.'<sup>46</sup> Racine thus earned the names "Danish Capital of America" and "Little Denmark." The first Danes came as early as 1843, arriving steadily through 1870, and then dominating immigration in Racine for the next forty years.<sup>47</sup> Danes contributed to Racine's political and industrial development. Danish influence in Racine was evident through their community on the west side of town, "Kringleville," and in the formation of the Dania Society in 1867, organized to teach English to new immigrants and to serve as a social group. Peter S. Nelson was elected as the first Danish mayor in 1903, and his efforts to improve the city included the initiation of the public park movement that earned him the reputation as the "father of the parks."

#### HISTORY OF THE RACINE PARK SYSTEM

This [park] problem is and will always remain one of the most conspicuous and prominent in the life of our modern crowded municipalities, because, it touches upon the very care of health and prosperity; a park develops the citizens sense of beauty, pours dustless air and invigorating sunshine into his lungs and *veins*, and, most important of all, a park gives city children an opportunity to be out doors. The park problem consequently has engaged the eager attention of municipalities everywhere. The cities assume dimensions making it impossible for their inhabitants to enjoy the health and beauty of nature.

48

At the turn of the century the city of Racine held in public ownership only three small parks: Monument Square (.1 acre)      cated to public use when

, dedi

the original plat of Racine was delineated in 1836, West (4.5 acres) and East (3 acres) Parks, both set aside in 1842 when the city of Racine was first platted as a city. All three small parks were clustered in the center of *the* city, leaving the majority of the citizens of Racine without a large leisure and recreational space close to their home. Thus many urban residents found *themselves* spending their leisure time in the pastoral Mound Cemetery, on the western boundary of the city limits, because it provided them "a place in the country" without leaving the city.

In September 1905, the city of Racine still held *only* 5.3 acres of publicly owned parks and 26.2 acres of privately owned park land.<sup>49</sup> The lack of recreational space within city limits forced citizens to begin considering the need for additional parkland. The Racine Daily Journal reported in 1905:

a complaint was made that boys had no place to play ball except on the highways. Property owners objected on the ground that windows were broken and gardens despoiled. Crowds assembled in the Mound Cemetery on Sundays. They sat upon graves and ate peanutswers were ruined and many stolen and other depredations committed.<sup>50</sup>

Lot owners were unhappy with the damage to their property, but the city's residents responded that they had no other place to go.

The park movement in Racine began through the\_ efforts of prominent citizens and organizations such as the Women's Club of Racine. The goals of the Women's Club, organized in 1896, were:

to bring together those interested in the intellectual, cultural, and practical improvements of women, and to promote agreeable and useful relations among its members and to advance all interests common to humanity.<sup>51</sup>

The Women's Club of Racine would play an important role in the development of public parks in Racine. Initial attempts by the Women's Club were to raise money to purchase land, improve it, and then donate it to the city. The Women's Club successfully raised \$1,000 and intended to buy land east of the Hotel

Racine to create a lakefront park, but the area was determined to be too small and the women agreed to put the money toward the purchase of a larger tract.

In 1902, park advocates led by Peter Nelson formed the Racine Public Park Association. The concerned citizens joined to heighten awareness of the benefits of public parks and to increase the number of parks. Organizers and early directors of the association were prominent businessmen and politicians of Racine, and they hoped that their status would encourage others to join the park movement.<sup>52</sup> Membership in the association was open to anyone paying a \$5 annual fee or a \$500 lifetime membership and allowed them to attend all sessions and vote. The work of the association began with the appointment of a committee, organized to petition the City Council to set aside land north of Twelfth Street extending to West Sixth Street for a park that would be placed under their jurisdiction. The City Council did not set aside the land until two years later when they donated it to the Municipal Park Board.<sup>53</sup>

Peter Nelson served as mayor of Racine from 1904-1907. As such, he negotiated with property owners, E.J. Hueffner and A.C. Frank, of the old swimming hole on the island for a two year lease of their property. The city agreed to pay \$100 a year rental with the option of purchase for \$5,000 at the termination of the lease in ~~May 1906.~~<sup>54</sup> ~~Mayor Nelson~~ appointed the first citizen Park Board of the city of Racine on January 25, 1905.<sup>55</sup> The formation of the Park Board brought the work of various groups, such as the Park Association and Women's Club, together into one concerted effort. The Park Board ranked as any other board elected or appointed by the mayor, and with approval by the City Council it was granted power to "purchase property for park purposes, to receive gifts in that direction and to maintain and improve such properties."<sup>56</sup>



The Board and the mayor were anxious to secure the Erskine property between Washington and Twelfth Street, for "it (was] by nature a natural park," and since the city had only been leasing park land, Mayor Nelson and the Park

Board asked the City Council to vote in favor of a one mill tax for two years to raise money for a fund to purchase park land.<sup>57</sup> Mayor Nelson began a plea for support through letters in the Racine Daily Journal which stressed to fellow citizens of Racine the importance and urgency of obtaining park land. He encouraged citizens to remember how they had enjoyed the island property, leased by the city the previous summer, and to visit the property before they voted. Mayor Nelson's and the Park Board's efforts were supported by The Businessmen Association, the Racine Park Association, and the Women's Club, which jointly agreed to raise at least \$10,000 for improvements on lands to be

Q purchased. Park efforts were widely supported by elite groups, but Mayor Nelson needed the support of the general public. It was ironic that perhaps those who could benefit the most from public parks created the greatest opposition. Mayor Nelson wrote:

The acquirement of a permanent public park is now before the people of the city of Racine, and I shall plead, it is a cause of every man and woman, every child, within our city and the cause not only of today, but of ten years, twenty years, one hundred years from now. This cause is not political, it is humane. It is neither Republican, Democratic, nor Social Democratic, it is absolutely a cause of all the people, all the men, all the women, all the children. The proposition is that we shall authorize the common council to raise the money to purchase the necessary ground so that when Racine has a park, it should be the city's park. It shall belong to all its people, be open and free and to all to enjoy. No private grounds, but public grounds.<sup>58</sup>

The City Council put the proposal of the tax levy to a vote on April 6, 1905 and it was overwhelmingly defeated.<sup>59</sup>

The defeat of the tax left the Park Board without any park lands to manage and it appeared that their vision for a park system had ended. The

Erskine property, promised to the city, would no longer be donated because its residents were not committed to the parks. Island Park, under lease by the city, was rumored to be abandoned, and the Miller Brewing Company of Milwaukee was interested in the property to establish a park and beer garden. The defeat of the tax signified little public sentiment in the city for public parks and the City Council stated that "the best the city could do was to lease a piece of land for park purposes."<sup>60</sup> The city retained its lease of Island Park and began improvements in the spring, leading to its opening on July 4, 1905. "Steps were immediately taken to establish a play ground on Island park, possibly the north end," based on a visit by park commissioners to playgrounds in Chicago.<sup>61</sup> Swings, toboggans, cross bars, maypoles, teeters, etc. were purchased and the city installed the playground apparatus, along with a bandstand for free open air concerts, flower gardens, an athletic field and eight-lap track on the island. "The leasing of the island was an experiment, it demonstrated that there were thousands of people who felt the need of or appreciated a public park."<sup>62</sup> The positive response of park users and the initiative by the Park Board led to the development of park plans that included this land and the land of Riverside Park.

Although the tax had been defeated, the board and Mayor Nelson were not ready to surrender the battle for public parks. The Park Board's effort to set aside a strip of land along the south and east boundaries of Mound Cemetery for park purposes in April of 1905 finally met with success. The Park Board petitioned the City Council to donate this land along the Root River for a park. The land located on the low ground along the Root River bank had already been determined unsuitable for use as an extension of the cemetery and the City Council agreed to grant the land to the Park Board, giving the city of Racine

and the Park Board ownership of its first public park, Riverside Park on June 19, 1905 (Fig. 10). The services of Jens Jensen, landscape architect from Chicago, were immediately engaged for the preparation of plans, and thus began his connection and involvement with the city of Racine.

Following the land acquisition, the Park Board petitioned the City Council for an appropriation of \$1,000 for park development with the agreement that the Park Board would raise an equal amount through subscriptions. The Park Board raised a total of \$4,000, with the help of a \$1,000 donation from the Women's Club, and the city gave \$1,000 allowing for a total park improvement fund of \$5,000.

The city's new parks, Riverside and Island, began to change the opinion of the citizens who had just voted down the park question. By the Fourth of July, 1905;

Evidence was plenty that the majority of the population wants a park and that they appreciated the places provided by the park board and the city.... The people walked from one park to another, went through the Erskine land just leased and not one was heard to find fault, in fact there was only praise by the multitudes and there is not the slightest doubt but that now the benefits of a park, regulated as it should, are more recognized than ever before and that in the future the masses will put their shoulders to the wheel and assist Mayor Nelson and the park board, instead of discouraging the movement. 63

In September of 1905, the City Council voted in favor of purchasing Island Park, then under lease. The option on the property expired in May 1906 and the city asked for an extension until June 20, 1906. William Horlick, Sr. purchased the property and generously agreed to donate it to the city for park purposes with the understanding that the money raised for land purchase would be placed into a fund for bridge construction and park improvement. William

Horfick's donation was accepted and Racine acquired its second park on June 20, 1906.

Jens Jensen was again hired by the city to outline a general plan for Horfick Park. In May 1906, Jensen was paid \$458.55 for these plans and professional services.<sup>64</sup> Jensen sent a Mr. H. Thomson to Racine to take charge of the implementation of the plans. Thomson and Anton Hanson of Racine, who served as his assistant, were hired by the Park Board to carry out Jensen's plans. Thomson had worked with Jensen in the West Parks of Chicago and became the first Park Superintendent in Racine.

The Park Board continuously sought additional lands for parks and on October 24, 1905, a three-year lease and option to purchase the land adjacent to Riverside Park was entered into between Charles Erskine and the city of Racine. According to the Park Board's Seventh Annual Report of 1911:

this property comprises 18 1/3 acres of woodland valued at that time at \$500.00 per acre, 23 1/2 acres of bottom land valued at \$250.00 per acre, five acres of upland valued at \$1,000.00 per acre making the total purchase price in the terms of the option, \$20,487.50.<sup>65</sup>

The land, Washington Park, was not purchased by the city until the day before the expiration of the option.

The park movement in Racine gathered more momentum in May of 1906 with the help once again of perhaps its biggest advocate, Mayor Nelson. On May 24, 1906, the mayor sent special delivery invitations to all leading citizens and capitalists of Racine to meet with him that evening at 8 o'clock at City Hall to discuss a matter of importance. The invitation stated:

I have a matter of considerable importance to the city of Racine that I should talk over with you this evening and I trust that you will find it convenient to meet me this Thursday evening, May 24, at 8 o'clock at the city hall. You will do me the favor if for the present this matter remains confidential.<sup>66</sup>

As the invitees individually convened at City Hall that evening they discovered that this was not an appointment with the mayor, but rather a public meeting. Mayor Nelson had summoned the city's movers and shakers to describe future park plans and hopefully secure subscriptions for the parks. The money from subscriptions was necessary for the Park Board to take action acquiring and developing park land and to encourage the City Council to levy a tax for the parks. The meeting raised \$1,080 to be subscribed annually for the purchase and development of the parks.<sup>67</sup>

With the new subscriptions, the Park Board was still faced with financial difficulties. The purchase price of the Erskine property was between \$20,000 and \$25,000 and it appeared that the city would not have sufficient funds to purchase the land. The Racine Daily Journal reported that citizens were backing out of park subscriptions for fear that if the land was acquired the city would not vote money in the park budget for its upkeep. Thus with few park funds available and a decline in subscriptions it appeared that the Erskine property would be converted into city lots and sold for private residential development.

In an attempt to increase citizen support for the purchase of the Erskine tract, the property was opened to the public on July 4, 1905. Racine citizens demonstrated interest in retaining the land as a park, and the Board of Park Commissioners leased the Erskine property on October 24, 1905 for a term of three years, beginning on September 15, 1905 at \$250 per year, with the option for purchase at any time for \$20,000. In September of 1908 the 47-acre Erskine property was finally purchased by the city for \$20,487.50 .<sup>68</sup>

The Park Board had been faced with financial problems since its inception, and each year the annual budget for the parks was not enough to

make many improvements on the lands that had been purchased or donated. The Park Board was anxious to have a permanent fund for acquisition and *development* that could lend stability to their efforts, ensuring the continuation of the parks. By 1909 it was estimated that the entire park system could be completed for \$79,000.<sup>69</sup> Peter Nelson, appointed president of the Park Board following his mayoral term, appealed to the City Council once again for a one mill tax:

This work has been carried on for about five years and it seems unfortunate that by reason of the want of the necessary moneys to complete the work that the present generation is to be deprived of the use and pleasures of the park.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, on November 4, 1911, the one mill tax was approved, raising \$26,592 annually for the improvement and maintenance of the park system.

Park Board efforts from 1909-1913 led to the continued purchase and development of park lands, a new park superintendent, and an awareness by the citizens of Racine of the services that parks could provide. In April of 1909 the efforts in Island Park were almost abandoned. The park had been flooded from heavy rains and it was felt that if this happened continuously it would not be beneficial to invest money in future park improvements and maintenance. Lewis field was completely under water, as was the east and southeast of Horlick Park, where the playground apparatus was floating. In 1910, Alexander A. Fisk was named the new Superintendent of Parks. Fisk had been employed in the West Parks in Chicago for five years and was in charge of one of the largest parks from 1905-1910.<sup>71</sup> Also in 1909, improvements to downtown Monument Square had begun.

In 1911, the Racine Park Board became involved in the national playground movement advocating playgrounds not only for children, but also for

the factory girls and young men.<sup>72</sup> Superintendent Fisk advocated "the playground need" in 1913 with a statement that Racine needed 3-4 more additional playgrounds. The current number of playgrounds was inadequate because most children that used the facilities at Lewis Field came from 1/4 mile or less distance, and the other children in Racine deserved the same opportunity. Playground needs were discussed at the Racine Woman's Club meeting on April 17, 1913 when Charles F. Weller, Associate Secretary of the Playground and Recreation Association of America, was the speaker. Those attending the meeting included representatives from the Park Board, the school board, the 20th Century Club, and the Commercial Club.

Next, the Park Board initiated efforts to acquire lake shore property on Lake Michigan to preserve the land and to provide recreational spaces. In May of 1911, land on Lake Michigan between Fifth and Sixth Streets was purchased for \$10,000 with the City Council's approval.<sup>73</sup> The City Council approved a resolution to gain 200 feet of lakeshore property on the north side of the city, along Michigan Street. Other new park land acquired by the city included property along the Root River. The Hilker property, south of West Sixth Street along the banks of the river, "land on what could be called a peninsula, situated near Cedar Bend" was purchased in 1912.<sup>74</sup> In 1913, the city's three new parks were named: the land east of Hotel Racine became Lake Park, the Hilker property was now Cedar Bend Park, and the lakeshore property was named North Beach Park (Fig. 11). Jensen completed plans for only one of these new parks, North Beach Park.

The Park Board continued efforts to obtain funds and in 1913, encouraged a \$50,000 bond to purchase lands the city already had on contract. The bond issue was to save the city money because higher interest rates would

be accrued on lands under contract. The issue was passed by a citizen vote March 18, 1913 and indicated public approval of the parks the city had already obtained and established.

The efforts of Mayor Nelson, the Park Board, and the citizens of Racine during this formative period, 1904-1913, created the structure for the park system that stands today. Efforts included the formation of a Park Board, land acquisition, park development, playgrounds and the hiring of Jens Jensen to design four new city parks: Riverside Park, Island Park, Washington Park, and North Beach Park.



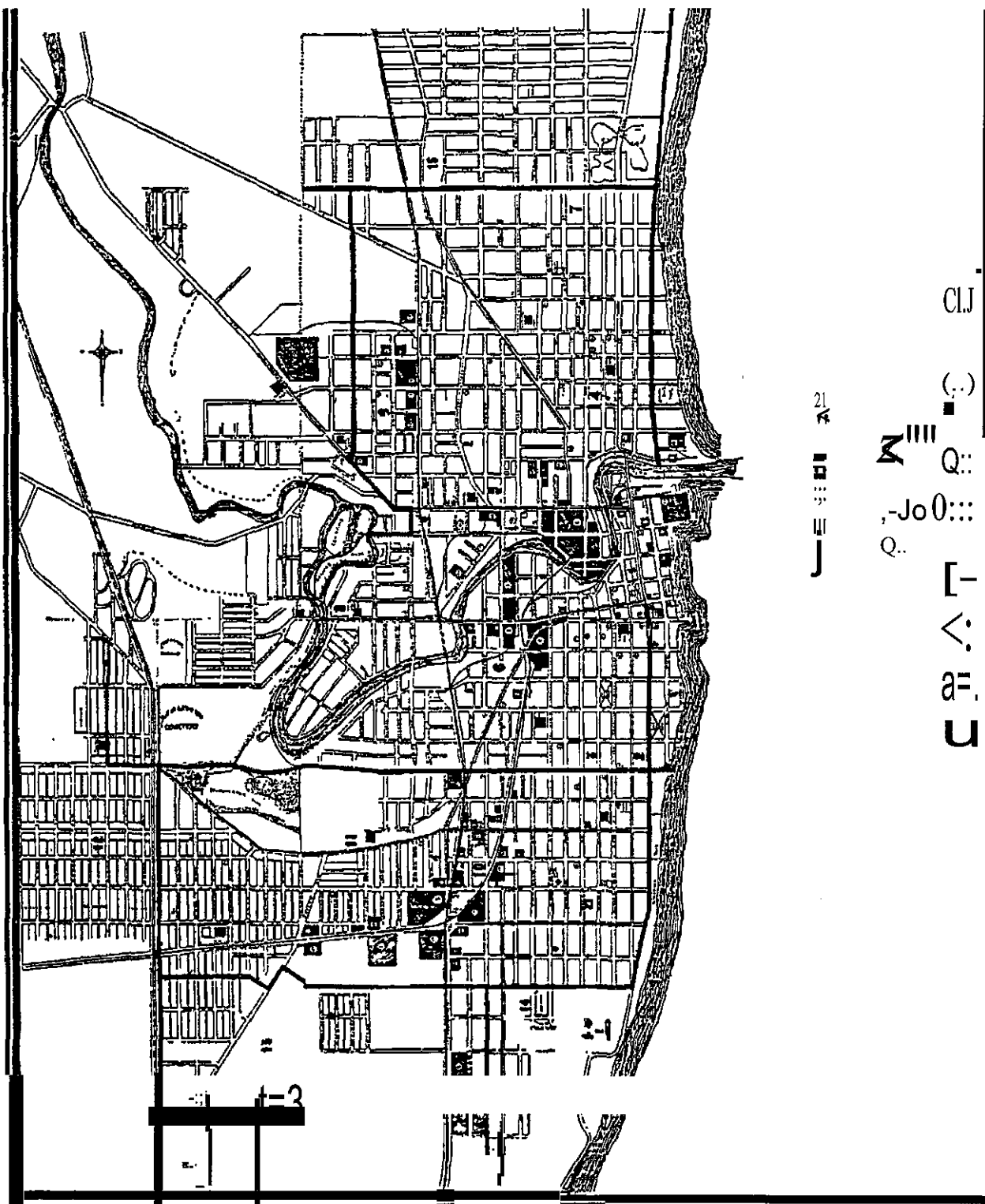


Figure 9: Plan of Greater Racine - 1913  
(source: Ninth Annual Report of the Park Board Commissioners 1913)

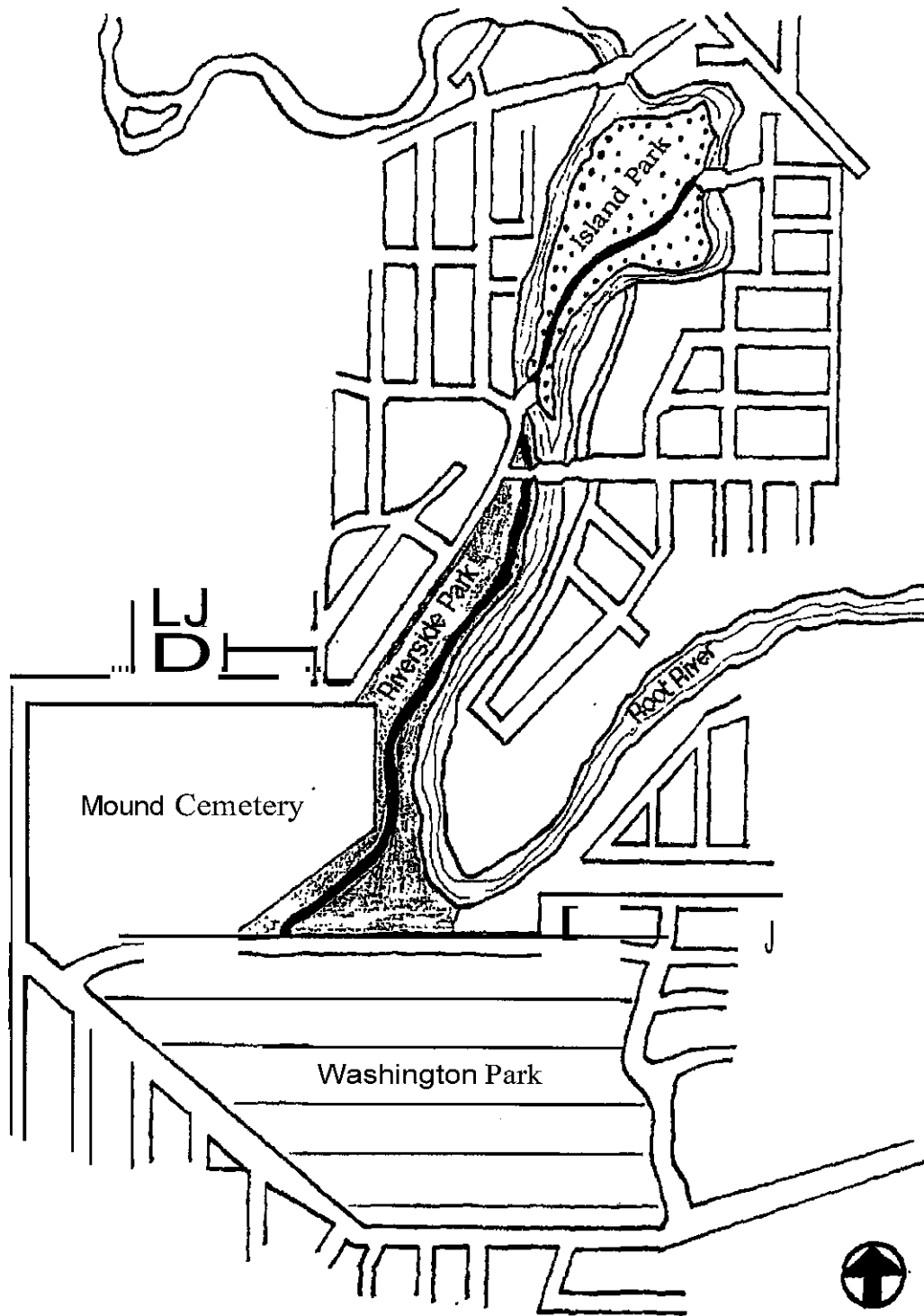


Figure 10: Location of Riverside, Island and Washington Parks

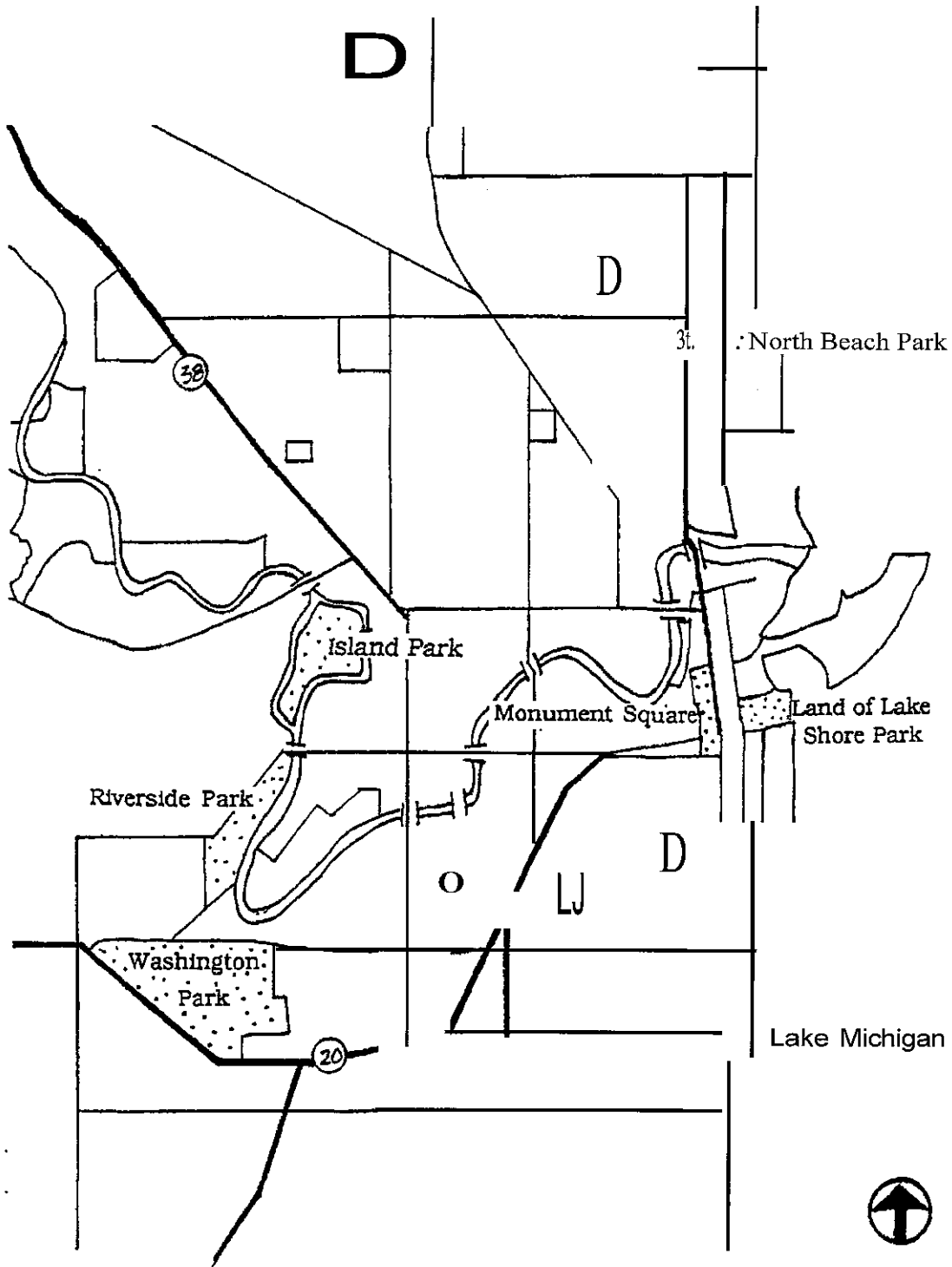


Figure 11: Location of Jensen designed parks in Racine

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RIVERSIDE PARK

In preserving these lands for park purposes, a grand view from the bluffs of River park will forever have been assured, and these bluffs form a pleasing setting in the landscape from many points towards the city from the south on the North-Western railroad, they give an impression of the intellect and refinement of the citizens of Racine.<sup>75</sup>

-Jens Jensen

Riverside Park was the first parkland acquired by the Racine Park Board and designed by Jens Jensen. Riverside Park was a linear strip of land on the eastern and southern boundaries of Mound Cemetery extending north-south from West Sixth Street to Twelfth Street and east-west from the cemetery at the top of the bluff to the Root River.. The park's 26.6 acres varied in topography from lowlands along the riverbank that rose to bluffs on the western park boundary, and its location on the Root River made it a desirable piece of land for park space. Riverside Park, sandwiched between the river and the cemetery on the approaching bluffs offered visitors a unique resting space.

Riverside Park was created by the initiative of the Racine Park Board. In April of 1905, the Board petitioned the city for the preservation of the land lying along the Root River. Since the ground along the river would be unsuitable for development as a continuation of the cemetery, the City Council agreed to grant the Board the tract of land. On June 19, 1905 the land along the Root River became Riverside Park. Development of the future park was reported in the Racine Journal Times with the visit of a landscape artist to the site. The

landscape artist was reported by the newspaper to be enthusiastic about the location for the park.<sup>76</sup> The paper did not name the landscape artist, but it was likely Jens Jensen because he completed plans for the park that same month.

In the first plan Jensen developed for Riverside Park in June 1905, he included the design for the adjacent island that the city had leased, but not yet acquired. The park system plan for Horlick (Island) and Riverside Parks was "a grand pleasure driveway with liberal allowance of breadth and a picturesque topography offering great possibilities for park-like treatment in design" (Fig. 12).<sup>77</sup>

The focus of the park was the river, with both a drive and a pedestrian path that followed its shoreline (Fig. 13). A leisurely drive or walk through the park offered city residents recreation and the opportunity to experience a beautiful and natural landscape. The circulation pattern was a prominent feature in the design connecting the two parks. The plan laid out a main drive that wound through the north-south length of Riverside Park from *Twelfth Street* north to *West Sixth Street* and continued through Horlick Park to *Liberty Street*. The drive beginning on *Twelfth Street* curved close to the bluff of *Mound Cemetery* following the high ground and then traveled to the low land to curve along the shoreline of the river. A system of pedestrian paths were laid out along the west bank of the river and up the bluff to the cemetery's boundary on *Kinzie Avenue*. The design focus was to provide access to the river without disturbing existing conditions.

Along with the pleasure drive and pedestrian paths, two meadow spaces and a canoe harbor were included in the plans. The two small meadow openings were located between *Kinzie Avenue* and the river and on the south end of the park bordering *Twelfth Avenue*. The canoe harbor with boat landing

and refectory was sited along the shoreline by extending the southern bend of the river. The purpose of the harbor was described by Jensen "to add picturesqueness to this part of the park lands."<sup>78</sup>

In January 1906, the "Planting Design for Cemetery Park" was completed. The plant materials and placement followed the natural patterns that Jensen observed, including a transition zone between the woods on the bluffs and the meadow along the riverbank. The retention and introduction of native plants was dominant in the plan with the preservation of many of the existing trees on the southern and northern parts of the park along the Root River, as well as the southern area of the park between the river and West Twelfth Avenue, labeled on the plan as "trees already on the grounds." This plan was an extensive planting plan for the park, including forty-seven plant varieties (Appendix B).

Jensen recommended that the bluff be densely planted with red cedars, canoe birch and white pine, "restoring the wooded bluffs to their former condition in a modified way."<sup>79</sup> Jensen advocated the plantings along the bluff to screen both the cemetery and the homes along Kinzie Avenue from the park, and to provide a transition area to the meadow on the riverbank.

The bluffs at the turn of the river especially need a treatment tending to make this setting in the river-stream as it flows past steep bluffs and where it abruptly turns, a more wild and daring aspect. No other tree except the commanding and stately white pine can give the bluffs its real characteristic in the landscape. Where the bluffs assume a more pretentious character and extend directly to the river edge, such additions should be made to the present vegetation as will give a more daring and mountainous character to these parts, and put more life and zest into the winter landscape (Appendix C).<sup>80</sup>

Just as the bluffs expressed their importance through the trees, the meadow below also found expression through its vegetation. The proposed plantings

included spirea and native roses to give "the meadow its pastoral and musical air."<sup>81</sup>

Two additional plans were prepared for Riverside Park. The first, "Planting Design for Riverside Park," undated, depicts the same layout for the park as the 1905 and 1906 plans (Fig. 14). The final plan Jensen prepared for Riverside Park was in 1911 and varied from the earlier plans by relocating the canoe harbor directly on the Root River, rather than in a lagoon area created by the extension of the river (Appendix D). The Seventh Annual Report of the Park Commissioners in 1911 discussed future recommendations for the park, primarily the canoe harbor. A.A. Fisk, Parks Superintendent, favored the plans calling for a canoe house on the south end of the park near Cedar Bend stating that "this bit of life which canoeing would add, would certainly enhance the picturesqueness of the whole park."<sup>82</sup> Jensen located the boathouse, and the plans for the boat and canoe house were prepared by the firm of Chandler and Parks.<sup>83</sup>

The plans for Riverside Park were implemented as both money and time permitted. Before 1910 only a portion of the plans had been completed with the lay out of the drives, the grading of the lawns, the construction of a water system, and a majority of the planting completed. Improvements continued the following year with the further development of the drives, walks, plantings, and river. Projects included the construction of retaining walls along the river to prevent the trees growing on the banks from uprooting, three-quarters of a mile of macadam walks six feet wide with proper drainage, and a flight of fieldstone steps allowing for a park entrance from West Sixth Street, which was elevated above the park about 25 feet.<sup>84</sup>

### RIVERSIDE PARK - 1993

Riverside Park boundaries remain as first acquired on the north by Sixth Street, the east by the Root River, and the west by Mound Cemetery and Kinzie Boulevard. The main drive, Horlick Drive, and the majority of the pedestrian paths remain intact as originally laid out, following along the river and through the bluffs to Kinzie Boulevard above (Figs.15,16,17). The boathouse and harbor planned by Jensen and implemented is no longer extant in Riverside Park, and it has not been determined when the boating facilities were removed. The small section of the southern area of the park has been altered the most, with the introduction of one hole of the golf course that begins in Washington Park and concludes across the river in Cedar Bend Park (Fig. 18).



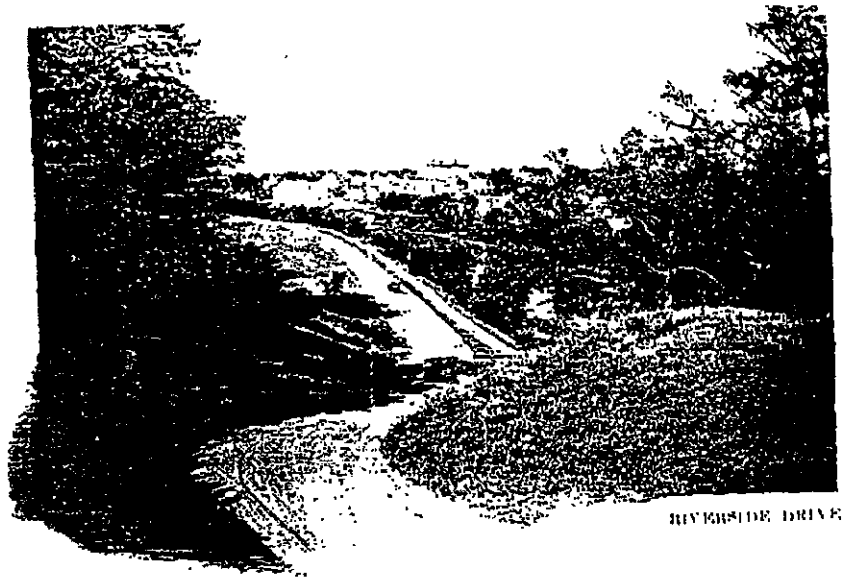
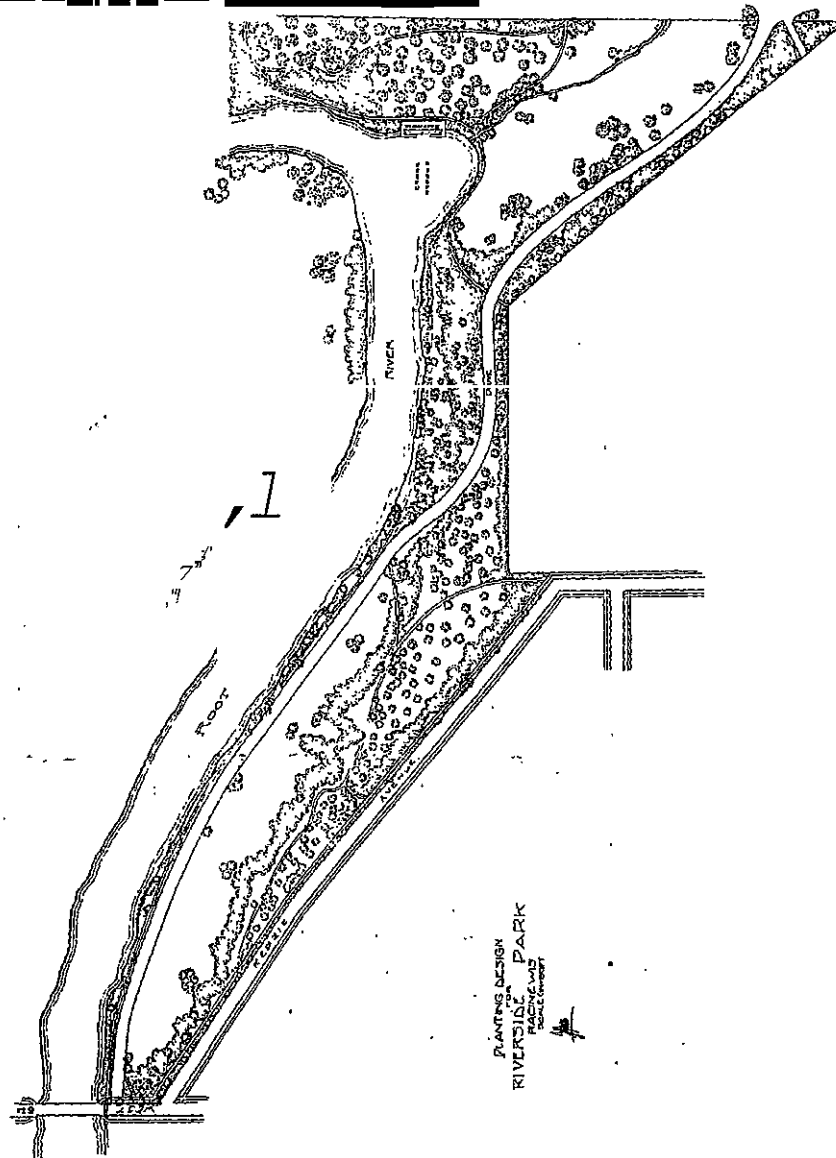


Figure 12: Riverside Drive - 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners 1911)

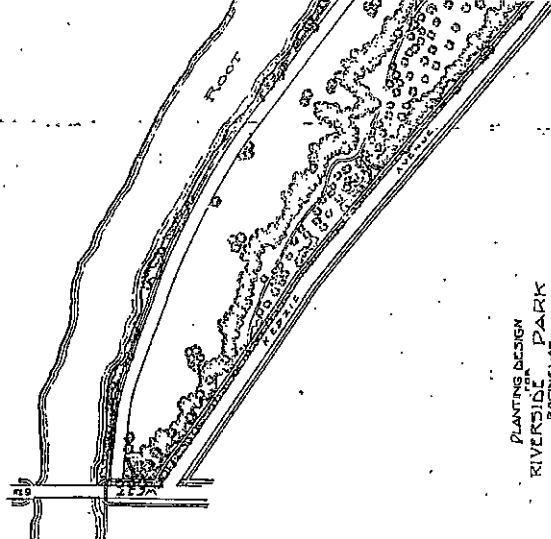


Figure 13: Riverside Walk, Riverside Park - 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners 1911)

FIGURE 14: "PLANTING DESIGN FOR RIVERSIDE PARK"  
(Courtesy Racine County Historical Society)



PLANNING DESIGN  
RIVERSIDE PARK  
BACHCHAWAT  
BACHCHAWAT



PLANTING DESIGN  
RIVERSIDE PARK  
PACIFIC AVE  
SCALE 1/8"=1'-0"



III III





Figure 15: Riverside Drive in Riverside Park



Figure 16: Riverside Drive in Riverside Park



Figure 17: Riverside walk in Riverside Park



Figure 18: Golf hole for Washington Park course in southern area of Riverside Park

## CHAPTER SIX

### ISLAND PARK

Island Park is a particularly good example of the Jensen concept of public open space, and the gently curving parkway drive is surely one of his masterpieces. 85

Island Park as it became known was actually the combination of two parks, Horlick Park and Lewis Field, both designed by Jensen. Horlick Park was half of an island created by the Root River and was the first of the two island properties to be acquired. Horlick Park, the land to the east (8.9 acres), and Lewis Field, the land to the west (9.95 acres), were separated by a lagoon (Fig. 19). Horlick Park, earlier referred to individually as Island Park at the turn of the century, was about 8.9 acres of parkland along the Root River located at the termination of Liberty Street.

Plans for Horlick were completed by Jensen in June of 1905 as part of the "Proposed Park System" which included the design of Horlick and Riverside Parks. The 1905 plan connected Horlick Park and Riverside Park along the Root River with a main vehicular drive and a pedestrian path system. The Horlick Park plan included an outdoor gymnasium with bandstand area north of Liberty Street, and a children's playground to the south of Liberty Street, in the area between the river and the drive. This early plan delineated planting groups but did not label plant species. A bridge was located at both the north and the south ends of Riverside Drive allowing access across the Root River

(Fig. 20). A footbridge was located next to the track to cross over the lagoon to Lewis Field on the west side of the island.

The development of Horlick Park began immediately after the plans were completed and the official opening of the park was the Fourth of July, 1905. The first park improvements included flower beds, children's playground and athletic grounds, which consisted of an eight-lap track, a hundred-yard straightaway course and various play equipment. "The children's playgrounds (were) laid out on plans similar to the best Chicago playgrounds and will be an excellent place for mothers to take their children on hot summer days."<sup>86</sup> Large crowds attended the opening of the park on the Fourth of July and it was quite successful.

Prior to the acquisition of the park by the city in June 1906, Jensen had prepared a second plan for Horlick Park in January, "Planting Design for Island Park" (Appendix E). This planting plan included changes in uses of the park's open space, but not in the overall layout and composition of the drive and paths. The outdoor gymnasium and bandstand of the first plan had been replaced with an athletic field and track which had been completed. A pavilion was placed near the children's playground on the east side of the park in the bend of the Root River, and a new refectory with a balcony to overlook the lagoon and Lewis Field was proposed for the west end of the Riverside Drive turnaround (Fig. 21). In the circular drive in front of the refectory a formal geometric "floral design" was proposed.

Jensen's planting recommendations for the park were quoted in the Racine Daily Journal:

A deepening of the waterway - say from 4 to 5 feet - surrounding the island is desirable, so as to facilitate boating and canoeing. The river current can be depended upon to keep the water in a fresh condition, and is not swift enough to keep undesirable water plants in check. Such



aquatic plants as waterlilies, rushes, cattails, saggitarias, willow, ' birch, reeds, grasses and marshmallows should be encouraged along the water edge with overhanging boughs of hawthornes, water beech, birch, alder, etc., to make the river scenery complete and ideal. This, of course, will necessitate the control of both sides of the waterway, or its purposes, so far as beauty and picturesqueness are concerned, will be destroyed. Enough land should be purchased on the opposite river bank to permit the planting of a proper border or fringe.

The island boundaries will require a liberal planting of trees and shrubs with characteristics suitable for a river scene on the one side and the meadow towards the island on the other. This plantation is to give more seclusion to the island meadows by helping to close out such objectionable features as may be found on adjacent river bluffs already encroached upon by the city dwellings of a displeasing character.<sup>87</sup>

### THE ADDITION OF LEWIS FIELD TO ISLAND PARK

Horlick Park was designed to be both a park and a playground, but because the playground facilities utilized the majority of the park space the natural beauty of the park had been compromised. In order to expand the park, the Board looked to the land adjacent to Horlick Park and obtained an option to purchase the ten acres of land lying between the river and the western boundary of the park. Through the generosity of William M. Lewis, the land was purchased and donated to the city as a public playground, becoming Lewis Field (Fig. 22).

The addition of Lewis Field to Horlick Park covered the entire island with park land, creating Island Park. Plans for Lewis Field by Jensen developed the area as an athletic facility and playground (Fig. 23). With the addition of Lewis Field for a playground area the children's playground in Horlick adjacent to the river freed this area from organized physical activities. According to the Racine Daily Journal, Jensen submitted plans for Lewis Field in February 1909, in which improvements included playgrounds for baseball, tennis, a track and two

rustic bridges to cross the lagoon and connect the plat with Horlick Park (Appendix F). 88

The undated plan, "Planting Design for Horlick Park and Lewis Field," depicted changes from the 1905-6 plans for Horlick Park. The plan increased the number of paths in the parks. The central playground was surrounded by a system of paths along the *river* bank *and* the lagoon. Vegetation was grouped along the river to leave the center space open for playgrounds. Two council rings were included on the northern boundary of both Horlick Park and Lewis Field close to the river bank. In the later plan the planting area in the circular drive was now a grouping of *seven* American White Elm trees, moving away from the formal "floral design" planting of the 1906 plan.

Jensen also prepared "Planting Plan for Lewis Field," which was undated. This plan detailed the vegetation materials *to* be utilized *in* Lewis Field and specified native plant species in areas labeled "native growth" along the Root River on the west side of the park. The lagoon, labeled "water garden," included plantings of iris, native grasses, rushes, and sagittaria. Jensen also prepared two plans in 1909 for two rustic footbridges to cross the lagoon to Horlick Park. The rustic log bridges used rough boulders for the top of the foundation footings that were visible above the water level line for a natural appearance.

Improvements to Lewis Field began in 1910 with most of the construction work and the installation of stationary apparatus completed by the end of the year.<sup>89</sup> The running track was removed from Horlick Park and a new one was constructed in Lewis Field. A rustic bridge with a 36' span was constructed connecting Lewis Field with Horlick Park.<sup>90</sup> A refectory was also erected in Island Park along the lagoon (Figs. 24 and 25). The Racine Daily Journal

reported that Jensen did more than site the refectory in Island Park; he designed it, and then Guilbert and Funston, architects, drew the specifications. 91 The location chosen for it was on the west end of the park on the east end of the lagoon, so that it could have several large verandas at the rear, which overlooked Lewis field. The plans for the refectory, completed in September of 1909, were for a rustic building with a boys and girls restrooms and two dressing rooms. The refectory was reported to be patterned after ones in Chicago and Milwaukee, but on a smaller scale.92 The refectory contract was awarded to James Anderson for \$4,500. The refectory building was started in the summer of 1910 and completed by the following spring. The building, 90' x 50', contained lunch rooms and lavatories and a storage space for tools in the basement. Improvements to Island park by 1911 also included the construction of two reinforced concrete bridges in Horlick park by the Illinois Bridge Company and the completion of the paving of the drives, providing adequate access to the park.93

#### ISLAND PARK - 1993

The boundaries of Island Park have remained as originally delineated largely due to the fact that the entire park is an island surrounded by the Root River (Figs. 26, and 27). In plan and principle many of the primary elements of Island Park remain the same, including Horlick Drive, winding along the river in both parks. Access to the park is still by the two original bridges constructed to enter the park (Figs. 28 and 29). Jensen's plans for Island Park included paths following the river and encircling the entire park. Most of the paths of asphalt and wood chips remain along the river with the exception of those in Horlick Park. The system of paths in Lewis Field following the river are still in place

today, but the council rings on the northern boundary are no longer present. Lewis Field is still used for athletics with two baseball diamonds and two tennis courts. A children's playground has been introduced into the open space of Horlick Park. The refectory building that Jensen himself helped to design was constructed and remains in place today (Figs. 30 and 31). A picnic shelter structure has been added to the east of Horlick Drive in the original land of Horlick Park (Fig. 32).

Figure 19: "Planting Design for Horlick Park and Lewis Field"  
(Courtesy Racine County Historical Society)

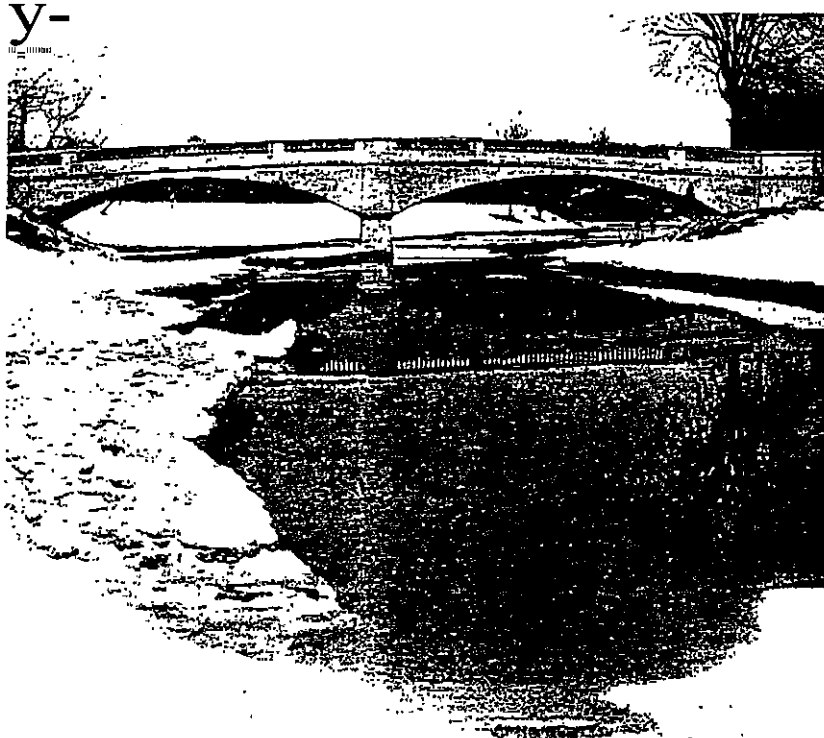


Figure 20: Bridge entering Island Park • 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners 1911)



Figure 21: Lagoon separating Horlick Park and Lewis Field, Island Park - 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners 1911)

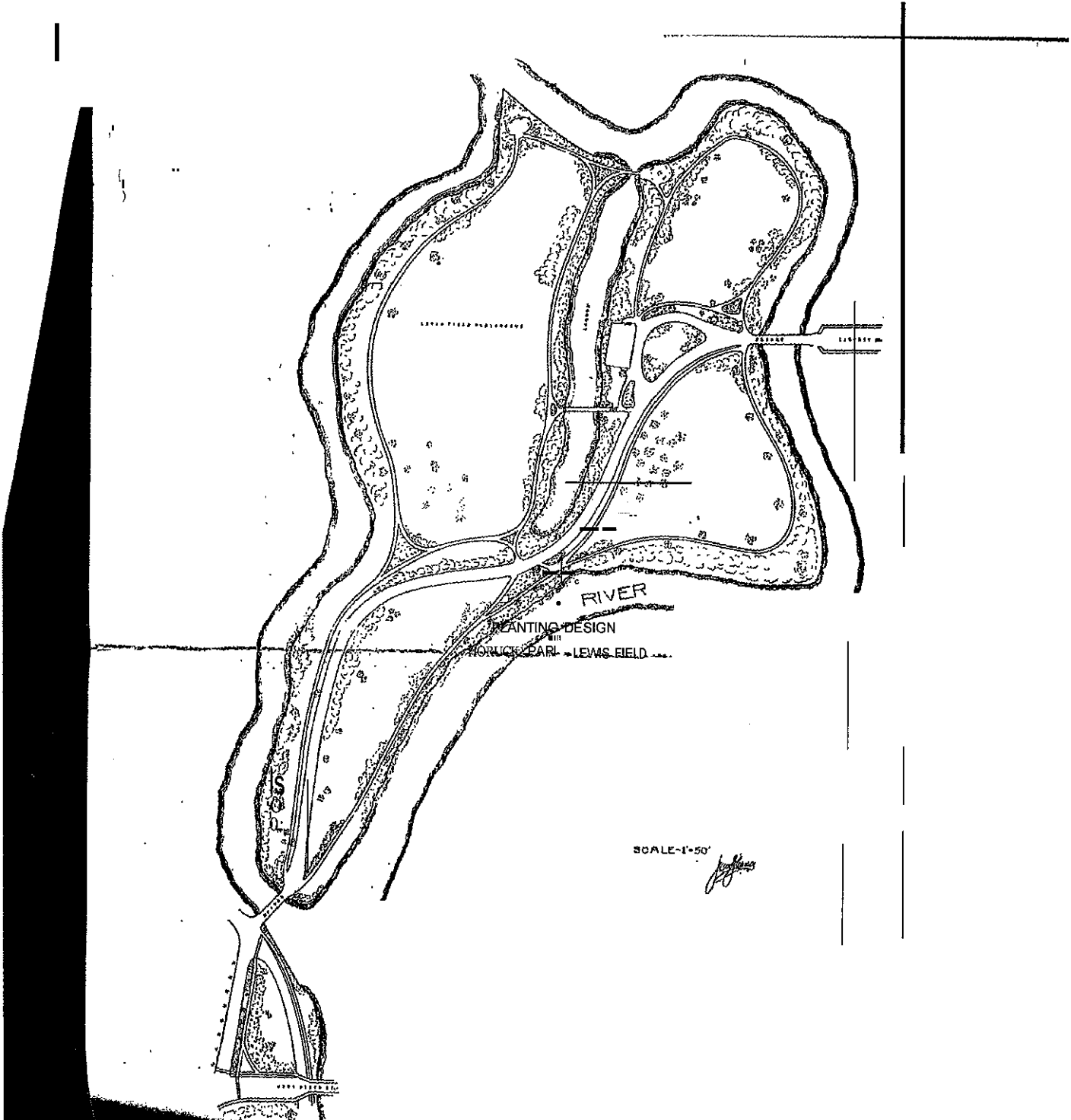




Figure 24: Refectory overlooking lagoon in Island Park - 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report Board of Park Commissioners 1911)

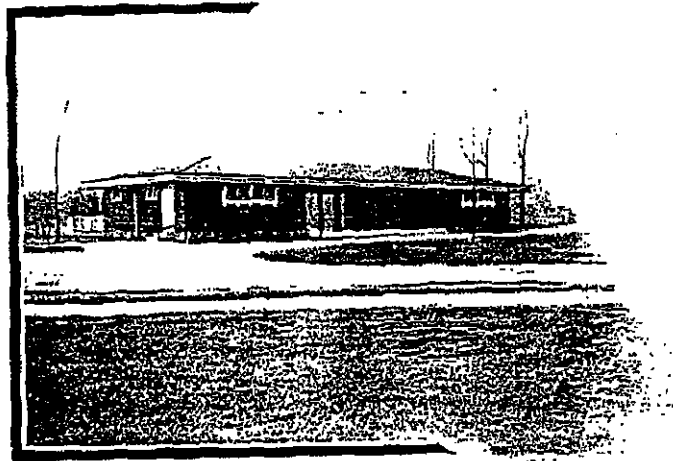


Figure 25: Refectory in Island Park - 1911  
(Source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners 1911)





Figure 26: Root River surrounding Island Park



Figure 27: Island Park



Figure 28: South entrance bridge to Island Park



Figure: 29: East entrance bridge to Island Park

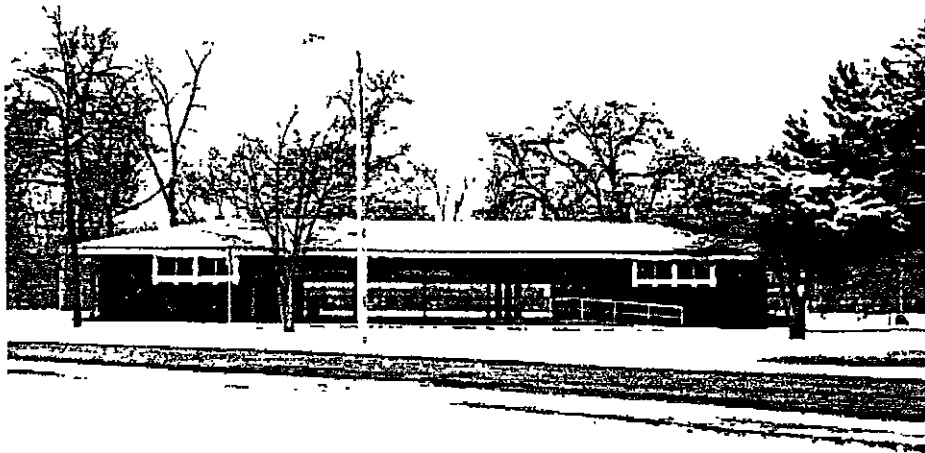
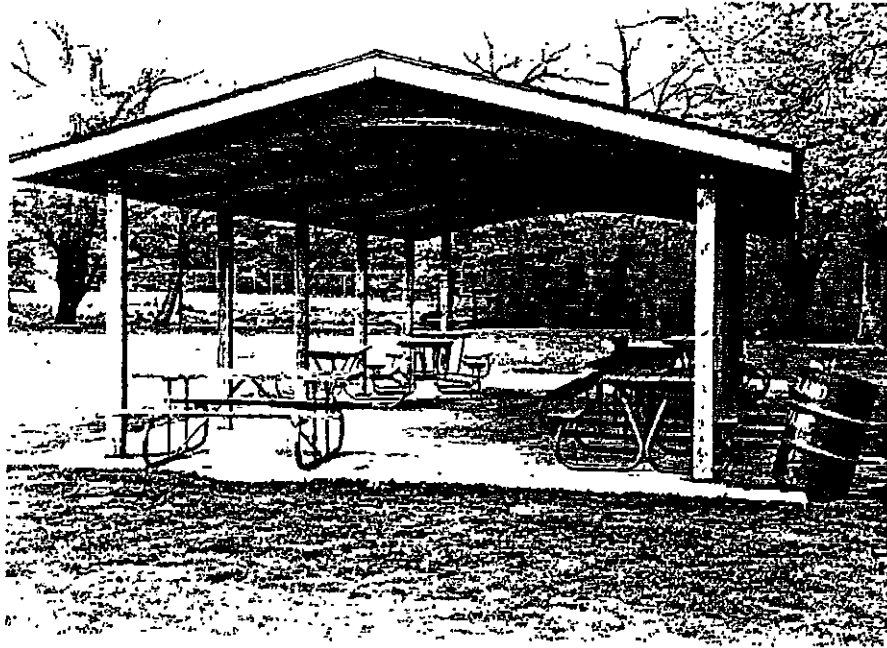


Figure 30: East facade of Refectory, Island Park



Figure 31: West facade of refectory, Island Park



1967. The pavilion is a gift from the community.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WASHINGTON PARK

Washington Park will ever be the popular picnic park because of the natural woodland. The woods should ever be retained in its wild condition. Its natural beauty far surpasses anything that could otherwise be created.<sup>94</sup>

In April of 1905, Mayor Nelson pleaded for the acquisition of the Erskine tract that had previously been offered to the city.<sup>95</sup> The Erskine property described in the Racine Daily Journal "included the magnificent grove of trees that the like is not left within ten miles of the city of Racine."<sup>96</sup> The property had many natural features suitable for pleasure park purposes, including large trees and a babbling brook which allowed it to be a cool and restful place. The northern section of the land contained a wooded area and the southern section of the land held a large meadow space beneath the wooded cliffs of the eastern park boundary on Washington Street.

Jens Jensen was brought to Racine in late August of 1910 to prepare plans for the Erskine property which became Washington Park. At the September Park Board meeting Jensen submitted plans for the proposed improvements to Washington Park.<sup>97</sup> As reported in the Racine Daily Journal Jensen's preliminary plans for Washington Park

... call for an attractive little green house at the intersection of Washington Avenue and West boulevard, just south of the west entrance to Mound Cemetery. Shrubs and plants and flower gardens are provided for on the Washington Avenue slopes while the grove is to be kept in its wild natural state as at present. Winding drives and walks are planted

through the entire plot and connections are to be made with Riverside park on the north.<sup>98</sup>

Jensen's first plan for Washington Park in June 1911 retained many of its natural features of the property, including the woods, the meadow and the brook (Fig. 33). The overall planting plan was divided into three separate areas: the meadow, the woods, and the formal garden and service area. All three areas were connected by a curvilinear system of paths. The winding paths were prominent in one section of the woods and in the other half, the path encircled the woods. A shelter was labeled on the east side of the woods. Paths were found in the formal garden and activity area connecting the pool, fountain, formal flower beds, barn and shelter.

The vegetation pattern included clusters of plants, primarily used as screens on the edges of the park and along the paths closing off unwanted sightlines enhancing others when opened up. The areas of the meadow and the woods were informally planted with primarily native plants, many of them already on site and retained in their natural state (Appendix G).

A separate plan for the formal garden area of the park, located in the northwest corner near the intersection of Washington Avenue and Twelfth Street, was completed in February 1911 (Fig. 34). The gardens and formal plantings included tea roses and perennials in symmetrical patterns (Appendix H). The area contained a circular pool surrounded by plantings of blue and yellow perennials with seating around the circle. On axis was a lawn lined with tea roses leading to a smaller rectangular pool with a pergola and formal statues flanking the sides. To the east of this area the service facilities were located, including a greenhouse, barn, boiler room, and yard which were screened from the garden by grouped plantings of white pine, hard maple, birch, and sumac.

From the circular pool, paths led through areas of a small meadow planted with native growth and a planting area of native herbaceous growth. A natural brook crossed through this section of the park; Jensen retained the stream in his plans and included bridges for the paths to cross over the brook. The eastern boundary of the park, Washington Avenue, was lined with a row of unspecified trees at an equal distance apart creating a tree lined boulevard on the east park boundary with Washington Street. The path parallel to Twelfth Street was densely vegetated with groupings of plants, including hard maple and oak, with an undergrowth of viburnum lentago, ninebark, sumac, crabapple, juneberry, and hawthorn.

Superintendent A.A. Fisk reported in June of 1911 that the plans for Washington Park were now completed and,

when carried out will make Washington Park one of the most picturesque parks in the country. The broad meadow below the Washington Avenue bluff will be left very largely as it is. We plan on putting a nine hole golf links as soon as the meadow can be properly drained. This golf course is to be absolutely free to the public save their equipment.<sup>99</sup>

The Seventh Board of Park Commissioners Annual Report in 1911 showed that Washington Park remained largely undeveloped with the exception of the golf course. In November of 1913 the completion of Washington Park lawns and walks was underway at a cost of about \$2,500.<sup>100</sup> The golf course was in use at this time and was a popular activity in the park. The original 1908 boundaries of Washington Park were expanded in 1913 with the addition of land on the southern boundary to include the area between Grange and Boyd Streets. The largest transformation of Washington Park occurred in 1913 before the plans were even completed by Jensen. The transformation of the meadow space into six holes of the nine hole golf course that extended into Riverside Park altered most of the plans Jensen had for the

park (Fig. 35). The golf course was carefully placed in the existing meadow area of the park and preserved the natural wooded area of the park. The addition of the golf course and building of a clubhouse permanently altered the plans for Jensen's meadow and formal garden area.

Jensen prepared a final plan for Washington Park in 1914 that was identical to the original plan of February 1911, with the addition of a section drawing of the formal garden, but by this time the introduction of the golf course had obliterated his proposals for *the* formal garden and paths *through* the meadow of the 1911 plans.

#### WASHINGTON PARK - 1993

Although the majority of the Jensen's plans for Washington Park were never implemented a few remnants of his suggestions remain in the park today. The golf course is situated in *the* large open meadow space, with *the* bluffs and wooded areas remaining in a natural state as Jensen had planned (Figs. 36,37 and 38). Through the woods remnants of paths remain that may be the original paths outlined by Jensen (Fig. 39).

Since the creation of the park, structures have been introduced into the ... park grounds, including a pool and a recreation center, both Works Progress Administration projects, and a clubhouse for the golf course in Washington Park. The circular pool was opened August 19,1939 and the pool and bathhouse were removed some time between 1949 and 1959,<sup>101</sup> The recreation building, located on Twelfth Street at Linden Avenue, contained an auditorium, gymnasium and three game rooms and remains on the north boundary of the park next to the Washington Park High School (Fig. 40).<sup>102</sup>



The original Washington Park Clubhouse for the golf course was torn down in 1967 and replaced with the modern structure that exists today at the southern boundary of the park.

Figure 33: "Planting Plan for Washington Park"  
June 1911  
(Courtesy of Racine County Historical Society)

Figure 34: "Design for Garden, Washington Park"  
February 1911  
(Courtesy of Racine County Historical Society)

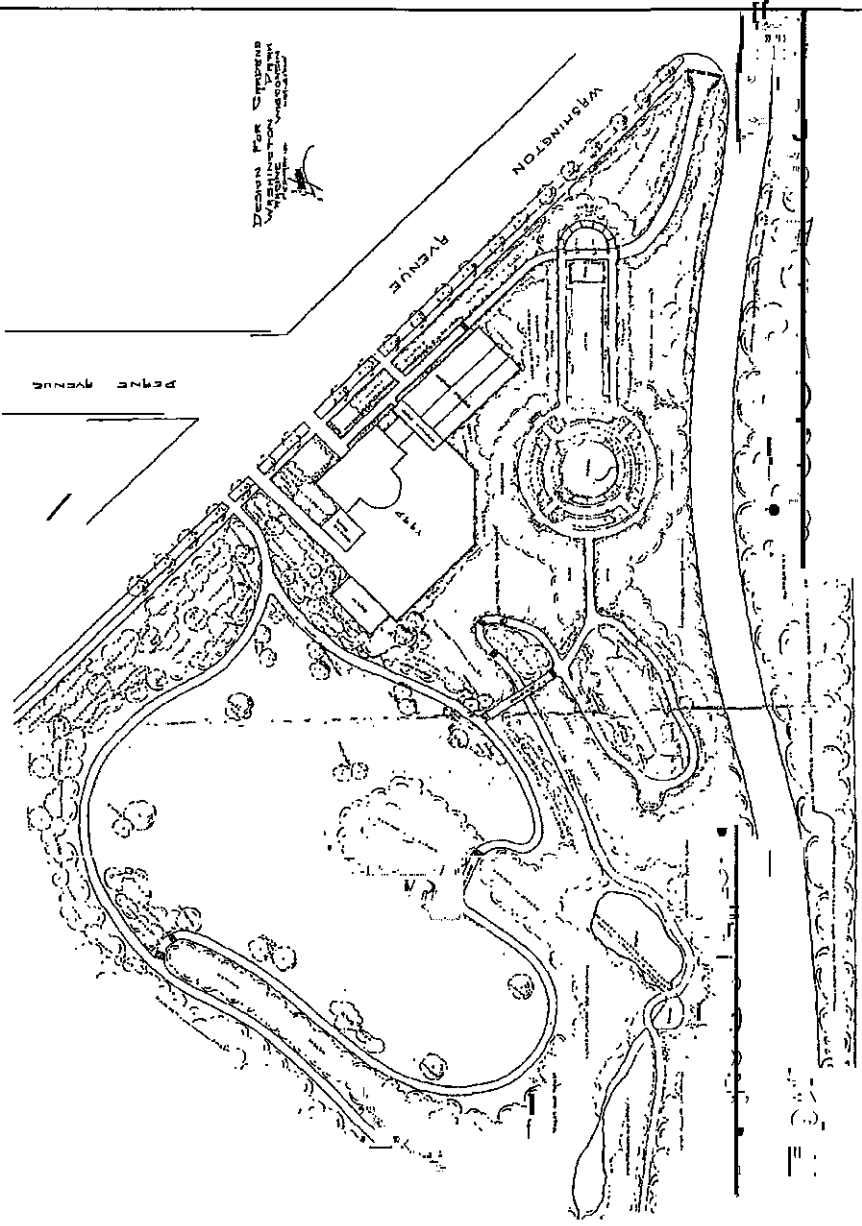




Figure 35: Golf course Washington Park - 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners  
1911)



Figure 36: Golf course in Washington Park



Figure 37: Wooded area in Washington Park



Figure 38: Wooded bluffs surrounding meadow in Washington Park



Figure 39: Path through the wooded area in Washington Park

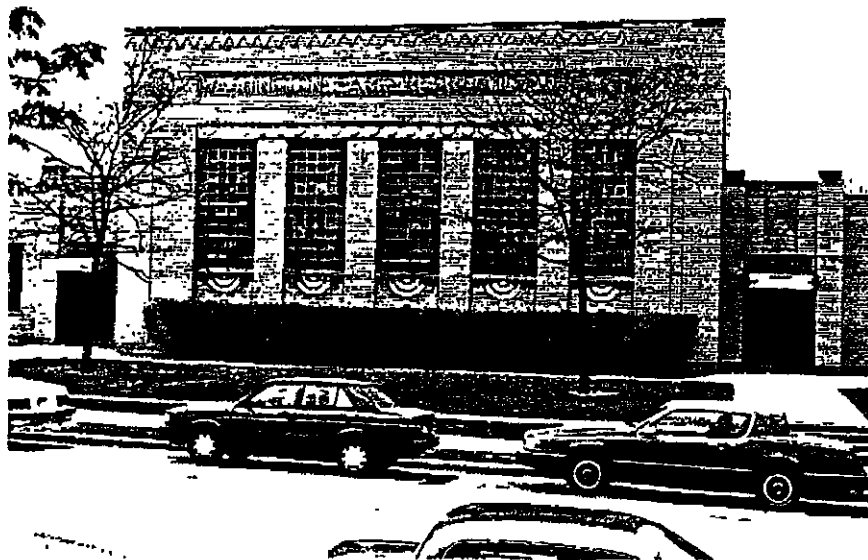


Figure 40: Washington Park Recreation Center

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ADDITIONAL PARKS

The involvement of Jens Jensen in the city of Racine extended beyond the three large parks he designed near the Root River. He was also commissioned to redesign the downtown Monument Square and the lakeshore property between Fifth and Sixth Streets. Jensen also encouraged Racine to acquire land on the lakeshore just north of downtown for its beauty; when the land was acquired Jensen prepared the plans for the North Beach Park. Jensen's involvement in Racine also included a sketch on trace paper, dated June 1922, for a boulevard to extend along the lakeshore from Eighteenth Street north to First Street.

#### MONUMENT SQUARE

Monument Square was 1/10 acre of land located in downtown Racine in close proximity to the shore of Lake Michigan. The square was bounded by Fourth Street on the north, Main Street to the east, Sixth Street to the south and Wisconsin Avenue to the west. The square had been the location of the market in the early days of Racine and earned its name as Monument Square with the erection of the Soldier's Monument in 1884 dedicated to those who fought in the Civil War.

On June 11, 1909 informal plans and specifications were prepared by Guilbert and Funston for the enlargement and beautification of the square.



Their plans called for dividing the grass plot into two separate plots and enlarging them, with roadways for one way traffic. 103

In September of 1909 Jensen presented his plans to the Park Board for the improvement of Monument Square. He called for the removal of roadways on either side of the Soldier's Monument and the replacement of the brick with flowers and shrubbery. The central monument was to be flanked on both sides by symmetrical water pools and formal plantings. He included the sinking of the lawn 18" below the curb line and surrounding it with a hedge of *berberis thungergii*. The two concrete water courts were sunken lower than the lawn and were to have urns at the corner. These plans were adopted by the Park Board on September 20, 1909. The Board wished to complete the plans that fall and only needed the City Council to appropriate approximately \$2,500 for the improvements before they could proceed. Although the Park Board and the City Council had accepted Jensen's plans for beautification, they were prevented by the property owners from proceeding with an injunction to prevent any changes to the square. The property owners *did* not approve of Jensen's plans because they were opposed to the cutting out of the driveways on each side of the monument, which they believed would hurt their businesses. An injunction on June 28, 1910 restrained the city from closing up the driveways of Monument Square. 104

The Park Board met with Jensen on August 24, 1910 to find a compromise. The property owners insisted that at least eight feet had to be cut off the west side curbing before they would agree to the removal of the driveways. Jensen said that this would spoil the plan but agreed that five feet could be cut off. When no solution was agreed to, the Park Board was forced to retain the driveways on both sides of the monument and yet utilized the plans

Jensen had prepared. 105 Monument Square was completed by June of 1911. In September 1911, Jensen was in Racine and observed the new Monument Square; he was satisfied with the results but still believed that the removal of the driveways would still have been the best improvement (Fig. 41).<sup>106</sup>

#### MONUMENT SQUARE -1993

Monument Square remains in the center of downtown Racine, but no longer serves as a focal point. Changes to the downtown fabric and alterations to the square and surrounding structures have changed the square's appearance and importance. The Soldier's Monument rises from the center of the square, but few remnants remain from Jensen's plans of 1909-1910 (Figs. 41 and 42). Only the water pools, now used as fountains are apparent with informal plantings and sculptures breaking the formal plans that Jensen recommended.

#### LAKE SHORE PARK

In 1906 an area on the lakeshore between Fifth and Sixth Streets was suggested by local businessmen as a potential park. <sup>107</sup> Frederick L. Osius had bought the property on Lake Avenue between 5th and 6th Street on July 6, 1911 for a factory, but on July 17th he offered the city a ten-day option on purchase of the land for \$15,000. The City Council allocated to the Park Board \$10,000 for the purchase and the remaining \$5,000 was to be raised through citizen subscription. The Park Board had difficulty raising the \$5,000 and on August 2, 1911 the City Council agreed to pay the entire amount for the

property. The deal was closed on August 14, 1911, with improvements to begin immediately with money donated by the Racine Manufacturers Association.

Plans for the lakefront property between 5th and 6th Streets were discussed with Jensen and at the April 10, 1912 Park Board Meeting, his plans were accepted for improvement and beautification of the Lake Shore Park. Jensen's suggestions included:

Running down from Sixth street to beach the bluff will be steep, with lime stone cliffs, planted with cedars and evergreens, stepping stones down through the cliff making it possible to reach the walk along the lake shore. There will also be a walk running along the lake from Fifth and Sixth Streets and also a walk off Fifth Street leading to the lake, a great deal like the one on Sixth Street between the beach and the bluff along the Lake Avenue; as much meadow as possible will be allowed. Settees will be placed along Lake Avenue on which people may sit and they can also sit on the grass. There will be a gradual slope from Lake Avenue to the beach. A sanitary drinking fountain is to be installed along the walks.

108

#### LAKE SHORE PARK - 1993

The Lake Shore Park property today is located between Festival Park and Pershing Park and serves as a public boat launch for the city.

#### NORTH BEACH PARK

North Beach Park was approximately 25.6 acres of land on the shoreline of Lake Michigan north of downtown Racine. The original area of North Beach was purchased from James Cape and Sons in July 1908 for \$10,000. The beach area had already been a popular beach and swimming area, and within a week of purchase money was raised by subscription to build a bath house.<sup>109</sup> Jensen submitted plans for improvement of the North Side Beach property at the February 1909 meeting of the Park Board. His plans, as

reported in the Racine Daily Journal, included the filling in of the grounds, building cement or macadam roadways, enlarging the bath house, and enhancing the vegetation along the bluffs. The Park Board adopted the plans with slight modifications, and improvements began. 110

#### NORTH BEACH PARK • 1993

North Beach Park property has been expanded further north along the lakeshore since Jensen's original plans, but the area is still used as a bathing beach with bathhouse, bandstand, parking lots, and children's play equipment.

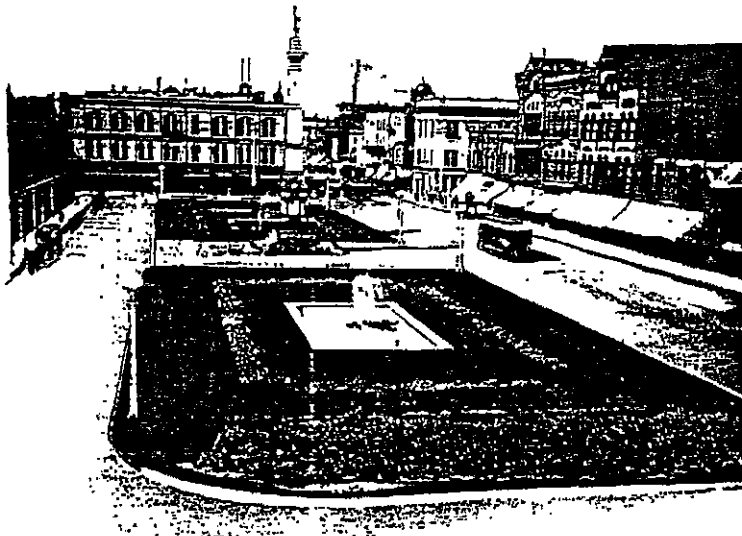


Figure 41: Monument Square - 1911  
(source: Seventh Annual Report of Park Commissioners 1911)



Figure 42: Monument Square looking north



Figure 43: Monument Square looking southeast

CHAPTER NINE  
JENSEN'S LEGACY IN RACINE

The Jens Jensen designed parks in Racine, Wisconsin are significant examples of his characteristic Midwestern style because they successfully integrated conservation, aesthetics and recreation into an urban park plan. Jens Jensen, an artist and master of this uniquely Midwestern style of landscape architecture, designed for Racine a beautifully integrated system of parks that remain a legacy of his beliefs and characteristic style. The Racine parks deserve recognition both as significant designs of Jens Jensen and as excellent examples of early twentieth century urban park designs. In the Racine parks Jensen's involvement began early in the selection and design process of the parks, resulting in strong examples of his philosophies and design aesthetics. The Racine parks demonstrate his understanding of the aesthetic and recreational functions of a park, while focusing on the native landscape of the Midwest and conserving many of the principle native features that were being lost to development.

Jens Jensen completed his designs for Racine's parks nearly eighty years ago, at a crucial time in the park system's development, when citizens in Racine had recognized present and future needs for public parks within their city. Hired in 1905, Jensen for the next ten years guided Racine's park development. He encouraged the preservation of beautiful scenic areas within the city and from his recommendations key natural landscapes along the Root

River and Lake Michigan were preserved and retained for future generations. As an outsider, Jensen opened the community's eyes to the quality of their natural resources and their responsibility to conserve them. In all of the plans much of the existing native vegetation was utilized. For example, in Washington Park, Jensen retained the woods in the western section of the park, as well as incorporating the creek that traveled through the park and in Riverside Park Jensen also retained a wooded area on the bluffs, and the natural riverbank found along both Riverside and Island Parks, as well as a majority of the natural vegetation in all the parks.

Although the three largest parks were examined individually, Riverside, Island, and Washington Parks; viewed collectively form an integrated park system. The park properties, adjacent to each other and linked by the Root River, were formally connected with a vehicular drive and a system of pedestrian paths introduced by Jensen. In the plans for Riverside, Island, and Washington Parks an equal balance was established between the recreation and the aesthetic purposes of parks. It was this balance of aesthetics and recreation that had challenged park designers, including Jensen. In the Racine parks Jensen met this challenge and beautiful, functional parks remain in place today which express the native landscape.

The landscape of the Racine parks has changed since their creation and has evolved both naturally and from human intervention. Neither landscapes nor societies are static. From his designs various elements were implemented and remain in place today, allowing some of the parks to retain design integrity. Riverside Park remains closest to its original design, although a small southern portion was converted into an hole of the city golf course, as the park is the central link between the course in Washington and Cedar Bend Parks. In Island



Park many elements from the 1905-6 plans remain in the park: the drive and paths, baseball fields, tennis courts, playground and refectory. The largest transformation to the park was the filling in of the lagoon in 1948 that once separated Horlick Park from Lewis Field. The lagoon was eliminated to accomodate the presence of the automobile and is still being used as a parking lot. The most dramatic changes to Jensen's design occurred in Washington Park, where the plans were never fully realized and the city golf course replaced the open space within the park.

Jensen's designs for the Racine parks although closely linked in principles and design features to his other major urban parks are distinguished from them. The Racine parks stand apart from Jensen's more recognized Chicago West Parks because he was afforded the unique opportunity to be involved in the initial selection process of the parks and therefore choose the landscapes that he felt most strongly represented the vanishing Midwestern landscape. Plans for both the West Parks and the Racine Parks demonstrated Jensen's principles by using curvilinear roads and paths, natural representation of water, and native plants, but the major difference in the design of the two systems was that within the Racine parks natural landscape elements were plentiful. For example the Root River, shoreline of Lake Michigan, wooded bluffs and meadow areas were located within the parks and thus Jensen's intervention on the landscape was lessened. Since the Racine parks naturally contained many landscape amenities his duty as designer was to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area while introducing infrastructure to create a pleasant, comfortable and functional park setting.

The historical significance of the Racine parks is not only achieved through the contributions of their designer, Jens Jensen, to the field of

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The historical significance of the Racine parks is not only achieved through the contributions of their designer, Jens Jensen, to the field of

landscape architecture, but also the importance of the park's design during a transitional period of urban park design. The Racine park designs balanced the enhanced aesthetics of park design with an increasing demand for recreational facilities. The Racine parks were designed amidst this transformation from aesthetic park areas to a focus on recreational facilities.

This research and assessment is the initial process in the identification of *the* valuable historic resources of *the* Racine parks. Further studies may lead to a formal recognition of the Racine parks through local landmark status, National Register status and appropriate restoration and preservation methods. This history and subsequent site evaluations would provide the necessary information needed to guide future preservation and restoration efforts. It is hoped that through this effort the Racine parks will be recognized and included among discussions of Jens Jensen designed landscapes and that the Racine parks remain in public trust for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

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82Racine Soard of Park Commissioners, 52.

83It has not been determined when the boathouse and harbor were constructed. The Racine County Atlas, dated circa 1908 depicts a boathouse along the river bank, following Jensen's plans. The superintendent of parks A.A. Fisk is quoted in 1911 as stating that a boathouse has not yet been constructed. The discrepancy may result from the unspecified date on the atlas and possibly the boathouse was built shortly after or during 1911.

84Racine Soard of Park Commissioners ,27-28, 40.

85Quote taken from Leonard K. Eaton's notes in the Jens Jensen archives of the Morton Arboretum, Illinois.

86Racine Daily Journal, 24 June 1905.

871bid., 23 May 1906.

88\bid., 27 March 1909.

89Racine Board of Park Commissioners, 33.

901bid.

91Racine Daily Journal, 17 March 1910.

921bid.

93Racine Soard of Park Commissioners, 1911.

94Fanny S. Stone, ed., Racine: Belle City of the Lakes and Racine County Wisconsin (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1916), 153.

95The Works Progress Administration inventory of 1938-1940 recorded that Charles E. Erskine offered the city the option to purchase two pieces of land adjacent to his homestea on February 1, 1901. The first tract of land was 35 and 43/100 acres located between Twelfth Street and Washington Avenue at a purchase price of \$250 per acre. The second tract of land was five acres west of the first tract at the intersection of Washington Avenue and Twelfth Street for \$1,000 per acre. Both tracts held the condition that they should at be all times used only for public park purposes, with the exception that a five acre tract could be used as a school site. Other restrictions of the land include that no intoxicants were to be permitted on the grounds, no amusements or games on the Sabbath and that a fence be built and maintained on the south boundary line with the expense to be shared by both the land owners. Lastly, the city could purchase only the first tract but if it purchases the second it must also acquire the first tract. 0/IPA 1938-1940) Apparently no action was taken on this offer in 1901 and the area for Washington Park was not acquired by the city until 1908.

96Racine Daily Journal, 1 April 1905.

971bid., 2 September 1910.

98\bid.

991bid., 17 June 1911.

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100works Progress Administration WPA Physical Inventory of Washington Park and Washington Park Swimming Pool, Racine Wisconsin (Inventory serial no. 55 and 55A, 1938- 1940).

101Racine Review,(Racine) 28 June 1948.

102J. Mandor Matson was the architect for the recreation building *in* Washington Park *in* 1939 (WPA 1938-1940).

103Racine Daily Journal,3G July 1909.

1041bid., 28 June 1910.

1051bid., 2 September 1910.

1061bid., 1 September 1911.

1071bid., 14April 1906.

1081bid., 1April 1912.

109stone, 153.

110Racine Daily Journal. 25 February 1909.

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Racine Journal Weekly 1905

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APPENDIX A: INVENTORY OF PLANS FOR THE RACINE PARKS

CATALOG OF JENSEN'S PLANS FOR **THE** RACINE PARKSRIVERSIDE PARK (CEMETERY PARK)

1. Planting Design for Cemetery Park, Racine, Wisconsin  
January 1906, signed  
plan including type of plantings and planting list  
150 x 93 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
2. Planting design for Riverside Park  
Racine, Wisconsin  
undated, signed  
plan  
138 x 102 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Racine County Historical Society Archives
3. Revised Plan for Section of Riverside Park showing new location of  
boathouse and canoe harbor, Racine Park Commission  
Racine, Wisconsin  
November 1911, signed  
plan including planting types  
80 x 51 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan

ISLAND PARK

1. Proposed Park System, Racine, Wisconsin  
June 1905, signed  
plan  
(ink on linen)  
location: City of Racine Park and Recreation Department
2. Planting design for Island Park, Racine, Wisconsin  
January 1906, signed  
plan including planting types  
106 x 72 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan

3. Plan showing new location of rest house and additional changes in Island Park, Park Commission, Racine, Wisconsin, 1909, signed plan  
25 x 50 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
4. Sketch of park shelter for the city of Racine, Wisconsin September 1909, signed plan and elevation  
59 x 27 cm, (red and black ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
5. Planting Design for Horlick Park and Lewis Field, Racine, Wisconsin undated, signed plan  
(ink on linen)  
location: City of Racine Park and Recreation Department
6. Planting Plan for Lewis Field, Park Commission of Racine, Wisconsin 1909, signed plan with planting types  
37 x 58 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
7. Topographical Survey of Lewis Field, Park Commission Racine, Wisconsin, 1909, signed topographical lines and locations of drain tiles  
43 x 60 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
8. Footbridge for Lewis Field, Park Commission Racine, Wisconsin, 1909, signed side view, end view and details  
34 x 47 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
9. Footbridge for Lewis Field, Racine Park Commission Racine, Wisconsin, 1909, signed side and end views  
33 x 44 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan

WASHINGTON PARK

1. Plan for drains of Washington Park, Racine, Wisconsin  
October 1910, signed  
plan  
138 x 80 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
  
2. Design for Gardens, Washington Park, Racine, Wisconsin  
February 1911, signed  
plan  
116 x 76 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Racine County Historical Society archives and Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
  
3. Planting plan for Washington Park, Racine, Wisconsin  
June 1911, signed  
plan including planting types  
138 x 80 cm, (ink on linen and pencil on linen)  
location: Racine County Historical Society archives, and Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
  
4. Design for Gardens, Washington Park, Racine, Wisconsin  
September 1914, signed  
plan and section  
57 x 52 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan

BATHING BEACH

1. Planting plan for park and bathing beach, Park Commission  
Racine, Wisconsin 1909, signed  
planting plan  
33 x 59 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan
  
2. Topographical Survey of Bathing Beach, Park Commission  
Racine, Wisconsin, 1909, signed  
topographical lines and elevation  
39 x 61 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of Michigan

## MONUMENT SQUARE

1. Design for Monument Square, Racine, Wisconsin  
September 1909, signed  
plan and section including planting types  
90 x 35 cm, (red and black ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of  
Michigan
2. Plan of Pool for Monument Square  
Racine, Wisconsin, 1910, signed  
plan and elevation details  
49 x 30 cm, (red and black ink on linen )  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of  
Michigan
3. Monument Square, Racine, Wisconsin  
undated, unsigned  
plan  
89 x 45 cm, (ink on linen)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of  
Michigan

## BOULEVARD

1. Boulevard, Racine, Wisconsin  
June 1922, unsigned  
sketch of plan  
105 x 46 cm, (green, orange and black pencil on tracing paper)  
location: Art and Architecture Library Archives, University of  
Michigan



APPENDIX B: PLANT LIST FOR "PLANTING DESIGN FOR CEMETERY PARK"  
JANUARY 1906

PLANT LIST TAKEN FROM:  
PLANTING DESIGN FOR CEMETERY PARK  
RACINE, WISCONSIN  
JANUARY 1906

Red Maple	Rosa blanda
Sugar Maple	Rosa carolina
Sumac	Rosa setigera
Common hazel	Witchhazel
Norway Maple	Schwedler's Maple
White Ash	American Linden
American Elm	
Hawthorn	
White Birch	
Wild Cherry, double flowering	
Prunus Pissardi	
Cedars	
Juneberry	
Hackberry	
Pyrus floribunda	
Pyrus abutilifolia	
Willows	
Black Locusts	
Berberis thunbergii	
Berberis common	
Berberis purple	
Cornus alba	
Cornus sanguinea	
Cornus stolonifera	
Forsythia fortunei	
Ligustrum ibota	
Lonicera morrowii	
Lonicera tatarica	
Philadelphus coronarius	
Philadelphus grandiflora	
Sambucus racemosa	
Sambucus canadensis	
Spiraea opulifolia	
Spiraea Vanhouttei	
Common Lilac	
Persian Lilac	
Snowberries	
Viburnum dentatum	
Viburnum lantana	
Viburnum opulus	
Viburnum opulus sterilis	

APPENDIX C: "ELABORATE ON PLANS FOR PARKS"  
RACINE DAILY JOURNAL, MAY 23, 1906

"ELABORATE ON PLANS FOR PARK"

From Racine Daily Journal May 23, 1906, vol. XLIX, no.120 (p.1&3)

"It will be remembered that Landscape Architect Jens Jensen, superintendent of the Chicago west park system, early in the spring submitted plans for the public parks of Racine to the mayor.

The park commission today received supplementary recommendations from Mr. Jensen, who plans to establish a boat harbor on the island park, and to deepen the waterway so as to make sailing possible. But few and slight alterations will, according to the recommendations, be made in the topography of the area, but a mass of flowers is recommended as highly desirable and picturesque along the river edge; in order to ensure the perfect beauty of this landscape. Mr. Jensen deems it highly advisable that the city should purchase a strip of land opposite the park grounds proper, as the floral decorations otherwise will have but a major effect.

The Chicago landscape architect strongly recommends that Twelfth Street be converted into a boulevard, and also that all ground available for park purposes on the banks, of the lake, be utilized.

Mr. Jensen's recommendations will be found, in full, below, and will undoubtedly prove highly interesting:

'Generally speaking, Island and River park must be considered a grand pleasure driveway with a liberal allowance of breadth and a picturesque topography offering great possibilities for park-like treatment in design.

Wherever the park areas facilitate the introduction of such public utilities as athletic fields, outdoor gymnasiums and childrens play grounds, they should be introduced, as such innovations will add interest to the park scheme and should remain until such time as public demands will require them located directly in these quarters of the city where the populace are in the greatest need of them, or, so to speak, when the play grounds may be moved to the front door of their benefactors.

A lagoon or river eddy is to be carved out to the swampy lands of Riverside park to be used as a boat harbor and to add picturesqueness to this part of the park lands.

Speaking of Island park, but little change from the present topography - save grading the ground to a smooth surface - is recommended. A deepening of the waterway - say from four to five feet - surrounding the island is desirable, so as to facilitate boating and canoeing. The river current can be deepened upon to keep the water in a fresh condition, and is not swift enough to keep undesirable water plants in check. Such aquatic plants as waterlillies, rushes, cattails, sagitarrias, willow birch, alder, etc., to make the river scenery complete and ideal. This, of course, will necessitate the control of both sides of the waterway, or its purposes, so far as beauty and picturesqueness are concerned, will be destroyed.

Enough land should be purchased on the opposite river bank to permit the planting of a proper border or fringe. The island boundaries will require a

the planting of trees and shrubs with characteristics suitable for a river scene on one side and the meadow towards the island on the other. This plantation is to give more seclusion to the island meadows by helping to close such objectionable features as may be found on adjacent river bluffs readily encroachable upon by city dwellings of a displeasing character.

The once wooded bluffs on Riverside park should be restored to their proper conditions in a modified way. This applies also to the lands fronting the parish college. This treatment will make these bluffs pleasing and harmonious with the adjacent meadow and river, by effecting a gradual blending of the meadows with the bluff scenery.

Nowhere is the planting of trees to become so dense as to shut off the view now possible from these bluffs. Yet it is necessary to include enough trees in the plantation so these bluffs may form a pleasing setting from points toward the city. This vegetation, screening the houses on the high elevation above the bluff's edge is to consist of such species and varieties as will transform the bluffs into flowering garlands in spring and set them afire with the gorgeous color of hanging foliage in fall.

The foot of the bluff, or meadow border, should be fringed with such shrubs as native roses and spiraea, and such vegetation as is capable of giving the meadow its pastoral and musical air.

Where the bluffs assume a more pretentious character and extend directly to the river edge, such additions should be made to the present vegetation as will give a more daring and mountainous character to these parts, and put more life and zest into the winter landscape.

A planting of red cedars, canoe birch and white pine at the top of the bluff is to be recommended. The bluffs at the turn of the river especially need a treatment tending to make this setting in the river landscape more bold and presumptuous, thus giving the stream as it flows past steep bluffs and where it abruptly turns, a more wild and daring aspect. No other tree except the commanding and stately white pine can give the bluffs its real character in the landscape.

Turning away from the river, following the edge of the cemetery we again meet with conditions similar to those which present themselves to us on leaving Island park. The planting here must be large enough to close out the cemetery features, yet possessing restful tendencies that will weave themselves most beautifully into the more quiet and peaceful pond and meadow landscape.

Sufficient aquatics are to be introduced on the edges of the lagoon to soften its sharp outlines and make the water scene more picturesque.

In looking forward towards park extension, it is here well to recommend that Twelfth Street be made a boulevard directly to the lake and that part crossing River park lowered to the present elevation of park lands, so as to make this pleasure driveway a part of the park, and inoffensive in the park scenery.

The low plats along the river bottom to the North-Western railroad should be added to the park lands and a driveway constructed along part of the river and connected with Twelfth Street before the turn of the river.

In preserving these lands for park purposes, a grand view from the bluffs of River park will forever have been assured, and these bluffs form a pleasing

setting in the landscape from many points towards the city, and to the visitor entering the city from the south on the North-Western railroad, they give an impression of the intellect and refinement of the citizens of Racine.

In conclusion, it is well to bear in mind the value of parks on beautiful Lake Michigan and before more park lands are added, a study of the general layout of the entire city will become a necessity, so as to provide park and parkways where most needed, and where they will help to beautify the city."

Jens Jensen

APPENDIX D: PLANT LIST FROM "REVISED PLAN OF RIVERSIDE PARK"  
NOVEMBER 1911

## PLANT LIST TAKEN FROM:

"REVISED PLAN FOR SECTION OF RIVERSIDE PARK  
SHOWING NEW LOCATION OF BOATHOUSE AND CANOE HARBOR"  
RACINE, WISCONSIN  
NOVEMBER 1911

Sumac  
Choke Cherries  
Hawthorn  
Hackberry  
Crabapple  
Hard maple  
Ash  
Linden  
Elm  
Dogwood  
Prunus americana  
Native Plum  
Birch  
Ninebark  
High bush cranberry  
Hard Maple  
Rosa Blanda



APPENDIX E: PLANT LIST FOR "PLANTING DESIGN FOR ISLAND PARK"  
JANUARY 1906

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## PLANT LIST TAKEN FROM:

"PLANTING DESIGN FOR ISLAND PARK"  
RACINE, WISCONSIN  
JANUARY 1906

Trees

Ash  
Crabswild pyrus triloba, floribunda  
**Elm**  
Hawthorns  
Hackberries  
Juneberries  
Linden  
Red maple  
Wild cherries

Shrubs

Spiraea Vanhouttei  
Spiraea opulifolia  
Common Barberry  
Purple Barberry  
Weigela  
Persian Lilac  
Honeysuckles  
Rosa blanda  
Rosa carolina  
Rosa setigera  
Highbush cranberry  
Witchhazel  
Common hazel  
Viburnum dentatum  
Viburnum lentago  
Camus alba  
Camus siberica  
Camus stolonifera  
Elderberries  
Bladdernut  
Meadow sweat  
Redbarked Willow  
Yellow Willow  
Elaeagnus  
Sumac