

Jens Jensen Park may be restored

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More than a decade ago, Elliott Miller brought Alfred Caldwell back to Ravinia.

As they passed Jens Jensen Park, a triangle of land bounded by St. Johns, Roger Williams and Dean avenues, Caldwell asked Miller to stop.

Caldwell had been a foreman for landscape architect Jensen when the park was created in the late 1920s. In 1930, Caldwell built the Augusta N. Rosenwald Memorial fountain in the park. Jensen designed the memorial for philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Company, who commissioned it as a tribute to his wife, an active member of the North Shore Garden Club.

Caldwell "was very proud of the way he designed the whole thing," Miller told the **Ravinia Neighbors Association** at their spring membership meeting May 14.

Caldwell is not alone in his pride. Some people in Highland Park today would like to see Jens Jensen Park restored to its original design.

The Highland Park Historic Preservation Commission will sponsor a symposium on "Restoration of Historical Landscapes" at 7:30 p.m. June 10 in the City Council Chambers. Miller will attend and discuss the restoration of Jens Jensen Park. He has found the park's original plan, he said, and found very early pictures showing the area, which used to be the village green area. A 1921 photo, for example, shows children in a production of Cinderella.

Dan Purciarello, Deputy Director of Planning and Development at the Chicago Park District, and two other groups which have worked on Jensen designs, also will attend to discuss their restoration efforts.

"It should be a very nice program," Miller said. "It will be very practical."

In addition, the Park District of Highland Park is planning a tribute to Jens Jensen Park in mid-September, in honor of the park's 75th Anniversary.

Jensen, who lived from 1860 to 1951, was a world-renowned landscape architect with a studio in Ravinia. He believed natural forms and native species should be used in landscapes, and his prairie style became very popular. He designed landscapes in Chicago, Denmark and many other locations around the world, as well as many parks and estates on the North Shore. He eventually settled in Door County, Wis.

During their visit to the park, Caldwell told Miller how the memorial fountain in Jens Jensen Park was built.

In central Wisconsin, Caldwell said, he found a huge rock with alternating dark and light glacial striations. During transport, however, the rock split. Workers had to cement the halves together.

The rock then was placed in a pool of water.

"It looked like the rock was growing out of the water," Caldwell told Miller.

The pool area was surrounded by a low ring of flat stones offering people a place to sit.

The mortar holding the council ring's irregularly flat stones in place was deeply recessed, an intent to create the appearance of rock formations in Starved Rock State Park.

"He seemed very proud of it," Miller said.

The fountain and park have drifted from the original design over the years. By 1940, the pool of water had been filled with dirt and flagstone.

Caldwell achieved a very interesting effect, Miller said, but "that's now lost."

Other parts of the park also have changed from Jensen's plan.

Miller said only two of the park's trees remain from the original design, a Linden and Hawthorn. According to Jensen's notes, he specified many other trees be planted in the park, including Ninebarks, American Elms, Prairie Crabapples, Hazel Nut, Native Plum and Sheepberry.

Some of the short-lived trees have died. Three original aspects of Jensen's design are still visible: the Fountain of the Blue Heron, and two small clearings.

The Park District of Highland Park has the restoration of Jens Jensen Park on its agenda.

"We have no real plans yet," said Rick Stumpf, director of parks and planning. "What we're trying to do is come up with a landscape plan that follows the original Jens Jensen theme for the area, and, at some point during the latter part of the year, have an event or maybe series of events just kind of recognizing the 75th Anniversary (of the park)."

During the next few weeks, Stumpf wants to hear from people interested in the park, its restoration and the proposed mid-September anniversary event. He can be reached at (847) 831-3810.

"There's a lot that needs to go into this," Stumpf said. "We're going to come up with something that is correct."