

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

Kentucky Library Research Collections

Library Special Collections

1947

The Parks and Water Works System of Bowling Green, KY

Kentucky Library Research Collections

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_kl_non_mat

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kentucky Library Research Collections by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

THE PARKS AND THE WATER WORKS SYSTEM

OF

BOWLING GREEN, KY.

BY

MARGIE M. HELM

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Park City Daily News clippings on the history of Bowling Green, W.K.S.C. Library
Times-Journal clippings on the history of Bowling Green, W.K.S.C. Library
John B. Rodes, Early History of Bowling Green Kentucky (1936) Mss. W.K.S.C. Library
The Story of Bowling Green Kentucky and the first Presbyterian Church
1939. Mss. W.K.S.C. Library
Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 2, 1862. Kentucky Library
Henry Fox, Jr. Recollections of Henry Fox, aged 86. 1892 Mss. W.K.S.C. Library
Letter to Amanda Bodley at school in Franklin, Ky. from girl friend in
Bowling Green, 1851. Kentucky Library
Lewis Collins, History of Kentucky. Covington, Collins, 1878.
Sheet containing the development of the Bowling Green Water Works System
in the 1920 decade.

Personal interview with Hon. John B. Rodes; dictation taken from him.
Personal interview with Miss Elizabeth Coombs, Kentucky Library
Personal interview with the assistant engineer in charge of the Water
Works Plant

The Parks and the Water Works System of Bowling Green

Bowling Green is about to celebrate the 150th anniversary of her founding. It was in 1798 that Robert and George Moore made application to the Warren County Court to establish the town and they accompanied their application with a plat showing lots, streets, alleys, and two acres for a public square.

So it is appropriate that we are studying the history of Bowling Green this year.

We have a park ordinance which was written by Mr. John Rodes and adopted in 1942. It calls for eight city parks and playgrounds. Six of these had already been established prior to 1942. The other two have been located and will be developed in the near future, it is hoped.

These parks are Fountain Park, The Old Cemetery, Reservoir Park, the Covington Woods Park, Riverview Park at the Water Works, the George Moore Park for Colored People. The two undeveloped ones are the West End Park where the Kenrad Plant is located and the Plaza on Second Street between College and Center Streets.

FOUNTAIN PARK

I shall speak of Fountain Park first. The 1942 park ordinance reads as follows: "That portion of the public square in Bowling Green now utilized for park purposes shall be and is now established forever as a public park and shall be known as and called Fountain Park."

The history of Fountain Park begins with the beginning of Bowling Green. Two brothers Robert and George Moore, who came here from North Carolina settled at the Big Spring back of what is now the C. D. S. Drug Store No. 6. They built a large log tavern at the spring and had a bowling green adjoining it. It was this green for the bowling sport which is believed to have given us our city's name.

*near corner of
main + city st*

Robert Moore set aside two acres for public buildings when Bowling Green was laid out. Here first were built a log court house 20 feet by 24 feet, a story and a half high, and a log jail 12 feet by 16 feet. It is interesting to know that there were also erected stocks and a whipping post. Mr. John Rodes in his history of Bowling Green says that he finds no record of the use of the stocks, but that the whipping post was used on a number of occasions for punishment for gossip, for petty thievery, and for vagrancy.

Second Court House

In 1812 a red brick colonial style court house was built in the public square to take the place of the old Log Court House. The logs from the old court house were made into stalls for a market on the northern end of the public square. The Kentucky Library owns a copy of an illustration from Lislie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 2, 1862 with a sketch of this court house. And we also have another unusual reproduction of it woven in a Jacquard coverlet. The coverlet was made for Mrs. Nancy Dunavan, granddaughter of Bowling Green's founder Robert Moore. The coverlet was inherited by her great nephew Mr. Hubert Graham and his son Mr. Lawrence D. Graham who presented it to the Kentucky Museum. We are fortunate in having these reproductions. Dr. Frank Thomas in an article written in 1898 in honor of the centennial anniversary of Bowling Green quotes an early description of that building as being a "handsome courthouse of brick 40 feet square, 2 stories high and containing ample accomodation for all time to come." This early writer could not foresee that Bowling Green could ever need a larger administration building than this one.

Fountain Park(2)

It must have been a building admired and beloved by our ancestors of this section. But the streets according to the memoirs of Henry Fox, Jr., were in 1819 very narrow and Jimson Weeds were so high that it was almost impossible for horses to pull the wagons along. I can imagine that they were dusty in summer and muddy in winter.

Many of the activities of our little town took place around the Public Square down through the years. In 1825, General Andrew Jackson spent the night in the early tavern, Washington Hall, on his way from Washington to Nashville. In the afternoon of the next day, many citizens called to see him and to hear him discourse on politics in Washington. Many of these citizens had no doubt been soldiers in the Revolution, and they must have listened eagerly to his reports of how the new national government for which they had fought was working out.

When another distinguished visitor, Jennie Lind, the Swedish singer, passed through Bowling Green in 1851 on her way from Nashville to Louisville, she drew eager crowds who gathered on the streets and in the Fountain Park. She was a guest at the Old Morehead House where the Helm Hotel now stands as tradition has handed it down from Morehead House owners to Helm Hotel owners. A copy of a letter written by a young student in Bowling Green to a girl in Franklin ~~mentions~~ ^{mentions} this occasion. The copy of this letter was given to our Kentucky Library by Mrs. Maxey Harlin, Jr., and her mother.

1857 (Enc)

Third Court House

In 1866 the old jail was burned by fire. It was then decided to take the advice of a local civil engineer, John G. Underwood, son of U. S. Senator Joseph R. Underwood, a distinguished early settler, whose plan called for enlarging the Public Square, tearing down the business houses on what is now Park Row, and leaving the plot in the center for a park. The lot where the present Court House now is, was at that time a station or depot for the Postage Railroad which Mr. Jas. Rumsey Skiles had built from this station to Barren River near where the city wharf is now. The site was purchased from Mr. Skiles and the Court House and the jail were in fact built where they are now and the Park laid out as it is now. But the business block was not bought unfortunately. This original plan would have given a beautiful approach to the Court House and much larger space for park purposes. Our present Court House was finished in 1869 just as it is today.

It is Greek revival architecture with Corinthian columns. The Cornice is one of the handsomest in Kentucky. Its staircase is very beautiful in its proportions. Collin's

Fountain Park (3)

Kentucky History in 1878 mentions that Bowling Green is notable for its beautiful Court House and its water works system.

So in 1871 with the public buildings removed, the public square was dedicated solely as a park. John C. Underwood, whose vision had been partially realized in laying plans for a park in the center of the town, had been elected mayor. Col. Henry Watterson, editor of the Courier Journal, made the dedicatory speech. He made several references to the "Park City", and so it was perhaps he who gave us the descriptive nickname of the "Park City".

Fountain Park(4)

At that time there was an iron fence around the park. This fence was built by Mr. Adolph Roemer, Sr., who is still living here. The fence was later removed and erected in front of Fairview Cemetery which also was designed by John C. Underwood. It was removed during World War II.

The first statues in the park held a scroll with the names of the Mayor, John C. Underwood, and the Councilmen. The statues were of stone and after many years they began to disintegrate. They were removed to the home of Mr. Sam Adams on Lower State Street where many of us remember seeing them. One of them is now preserved in the garden of Miss Margaret Hobson at her home Walnut Lawn on the Morgantown Road.

In 1881, a fountain and pool were erected in the center during the administration of Mayor H. C. Hines. The statues around the fountain are four goddesses, Ceres, Flora, Melpomene, Pomona. These goddesses of Grain, Flowers, Drama, and Fruit are indicative of our agriculture life and activity.

The stone arch over the northeast entrance was erected by Mr. Sam A. Walker in memory of his wife. His initials S. A. W. may be seen in a monogram in the arch.

When the late Cooper Wilkins came home to retire, he took for his hobby the care of the park.

In 1934 when the Bowling Green Garden Club was organized, their first civic project was beautification of the park. Mrs. Chas Stovall tells the story of the Garden Club's work in an article in the P. C. Daily in 1940. A landscape architect, Mr. R. S. Sturtevant of Groton, Mass., made a blue print for planting in the park grounds. Funds for carrying out of this program were raised by a contribution from the city treasury under the direction of Mayor Tom Callis and donations from the men's three civic clubs. The Bowling Green-Garden Club supervised the planting. One citizen donated 300 tulip bulbs and Mr. W. C. Sumpter gave stone colored paint for the four metal statues. This landscaping was done in 1934 and 1935.

An editorial in the Park City Daily News in June 1947 calls our attention to the fact that the fountain no longer is provided with fresh water to cascade from its adorning gargoyles and the water in the pool is stagnant. In fact the pump which formerly circulated the water now has been removed to the city garage and the pipes are rusted. The recommendation of the Daily News is that the fountain be repaired and placed in first class condition.

Fountain Park (5)

A letter in the Park City Daily News of October 1, 1947, Mr. C. W. Lampkin recommended that the park be given more attention and that it be planted in Italian rye grass.

Fountain Park means much to us in Bowling Green. It has been the scene of patriotic celebrations, political speakings, band concerts, the place from which we have watched our parades. It is the heart of Bowling Green.

George Moore Playground

George Moore Playground for Negroes is our second oldest public park. It is described in the Park Ordinance as the "open space on the west corner of the intersection of Second and State Streets in Bowling Green embracing nearly two acres, together with any further acreage which may be acquired by the city and adjoining same, shall be and is now dedicated as a playground and park for the benefit of the people of Bowling Green and of its colored people and shall be known and called the George Moore Playground; he having in the year 1807 dedicated the ~~same~~ same to the public. The said property lies on the opposite side of the street from the colored public school."

It was not always intended for the colored people, but it is now, because of its location, so designated.

In 1807 George Moore set aside two acres for a public square for a "new town". But this town was absorbed by "Old Town" or Bowling Green.. These two acres are still city-owned. The colored schools were later built on part of the section and the other part is the square in front of the Schools. Boys use the lot for ball games and golf or shinny.

I am told by Dr. M. L. Billings, who is chairman of the Civilian Park and Playgrounds Committee, that equipment for a playground has already been planned for this park and will be erected in the near future. This park should be landscaped and equipped for the use of the people of this section.

Old Cemetery

The history of this cemetery as public property is also old. It begins in 1817 when the trustees of the city purchased from Robert Moore one half block or what is now the College Street side of the Old Cemetery for the price of \$50.00 and designated it as a "Public Graveyard." Graves had in fact been put there as early as 1811. In 1829 William Voltaire Loving and the other heirs of John Loving sold and conveyed to the city the rest of the block. The graveyard adjoined the burying ground of the First Presbyterian Church. The church stood on the corner of Sixth and College Streets. This history was told by Mr. John Rodes when the First Presbyterian Church held a service in the Old Cemetery in October of 1933.

Tradition says that the church burned in 1831 or 1832, and we know that a new church was built in 1833 in a different location, the corner of Tenth and State. The whole block then became the "Public Graveyard".

By the time of the Civil War, the Old Cemetery was beginning to be filled up, and a new cemetery was located where the present one stands and named Fairview Cemetery, by which it is still known. The remains of many persons buried in the Old Cemetery were removed in 1864 and 1865 to the New Cemetery.

With the passing of the children of the pioneers who were buried in the Old Cemetery it became neglected. Weeds grew high, mounds sank, tombstones fell and some were carried away and put to other uses. When many of us were growing up here, we used to lament that the Old Cemetery was not cared for.

So it was a gratification to the town in general when Mr. John Rodes, beginning his term as mayor in 1929, announced that his plan for the development of the parks included the restoration of the Old Cemetery.

The ground was plowed up and sowed in bluegrass. Walks were laid and Mr. Rodes with his knowledge of local history erected and placed the fallen tombstones. He appointed a Committee for landscaping, composed of Miss Florence Ragland and Mrs. Duncan Milliken, Sr., to work with Mr. Ennis Harris of the Board of Public Works. Trees and shrubs were planted, and on the Center Street side was planted a row of Lombardy Poplars.

The people in the neighborhood enjoy the plot now as a park and use its walks. Others of us enjoy a visit

Old Cemetery (2)

there to read the inscriptions and learn of the people who built our city. There is the grave of George Moore, one of the founders of Bowling Green. The tomb of his brother, Robert Moore, is evidently lost. Others are Samuel Work, John Loving; at least seven Revolutionary soldiers, Franklin Jones who with his wife taught the school in the basement of the Presbyterian Church from 1832 for many years. Others families having lots here were the Grahams, Stubbins, Moreheads, Griders, Barclays, Quigleys, Briggs.

[Jones]

Another grave is that of the Rev. Joseph B. Hapsley who organized the Presbyterian Church in 1819. He died in 1823 and was at first buried in the family lot on his farm later owned by the Searcy family. Some years after the church was burned, his body was removed and buried in the place beneath where his pulpit stood.

This cemetery is consecrated ground to us Daughters of the American Revolution.

Reservoir Park

The Park ordinance reads: "All parts of Reservoir Hill except what is actually needed and utilized for hospital or waterworks purposes shall be and is now dedicated forever to park and playground purposes and the same shall be known and called Reservoir Park."

The first information that I have regarding our Reservoir Hill is long before we had a water system or a reservoir. A grant for a school Warren Seminary was made in 1813. Hereafter the hill seems to have been known as College Hill, and it is so designated on the fort maps of Bowling Green at the time of the Civil War. Before the seminary actually opened it became the Southern College of Kentucky, incorporated in 1819.

The college had a desultory existence for several years according to information furnished me by Miss Elizabeth Coombs of the Kentucky Library. Finally in 1859 the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, secured the transfer of the Charter of Southern College of Kentucky for a college they were attempting to establish. Citizens of all denominations gave subscriptions. The foundation was built and the cornerstone laid for this new college to be built on what is now Reservoir Hill. The building was never finished due to the outbreak of the Civil War. ~~After the Confederates withdrew from Bowling Green~~ the foundations were completely destroyed and the project was abandoned.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Confederate troops under General A. S. Johnston used the hill site for a camp of soldiers. Another camp site was Vinegar Hill now College Heights. You can still see on Reservoir Hill some of the tumbled masonry of breast works erected at the beginning of the Civil War. The Confederate troops had to evacuate in February, 1862, so they did not get to enjoy it long. Federal troops occupied Bowling Green from 1862 until the close of the war. General Mitchell in charge of the Federal troops began adding to the fortifications begun by the Confederate troops. Mr. Rodes recalled hearing Mr. Webb Wright and other older men tell him of how they and other Confederate youths were drafted to work on this "Yankee Fort" and how much they resented having to do it. They planned secretly to kill the Yankee General some day when he was fishing but their boyish plan was not carried out.

The Reservoir Park was located on Reservoir Hill when Dr. T. B. Wright established the Waterworks system in 1871 and I shall refer to his work later.

The citizens of the Community took great interest in the park and many individuals and organizations planted trees. Mr. John I. Younglove always interested in nature and in the growing little city planted a great many trees. The variety of its trees is remarkable.

For many years the reservoir tank was unguarded and the ascent to its height was a favorite walk for young couples. Students of astronomy sometimes studied the stars from its elevation. It offered an excellent view of Halley's Comet at the time of its appearance in 1910, as I can testify. Children have always loved rolling down its grassy slopes.

~~In the early part~~ ^{later} a wading pool, swings and tennis courts were added to the natural facilities for recreation. Also a stone pavilion was built for shelter. It has always been a favorite picnic resort.

Reservoir Park (2)

The depression during the administration of Mr. Rodas as mayor may have prevented the achievement of some of his plans for park development. But he accomplished a great deal in Reservoir Park notwithstanding. He set up an employment program and gave work to many laborers without jobs. The back hillside was cleaned up, iris planted, springs cleaned and piped off to water the flowers and shrubs, the old city ~~burn~~ torn down, more tennis courts ~~laid out~~, a graded road down the hill laid out and graveled. Once more the Reservoir Park is a place of beauty and from no other place are there more beautiful views.

Since the beginning of World War II the water tank has been protected by gates in order to prevent contamination of the water supply. No more may visitors walk around the top ~~and~~ see the Dorothy Perkins rambler climbing over the Walk's railing or admire the constellations above.

Covington Woods Park

"The sixty acres of land on the east of the city and bordering Covington Avenue and Edgewood Drive shall be and is now dedicated forever as a public park and playground and shall hereafter be known and called Covington Woods."

This park is now generally spoken of as the Municipal Park. I believe Al Temple calls it by its official name, Covington Woods. I wish we would not drop that name of Covington Woods. In Paris, France, the largest park there is known as Le Bois, The Woods. Here we have the distinctive name of Covington Woods. The Covington family came here after the Revolution and took up large land holdings. Some of the land is still in Covington ownership. The Covington family has always been prominent in Bowling Green and Warren County. Major Wells Covington who celebrated his ninety-first birthday recently still resides on some of his forefather's acres. So I wish we would use the term Covington Woods and try to get others to do so. Any city can have a municipal park. The term woods is enticing and Covington Woods is a distinctive name with Bowling Green traditions behind it.

It was purchased in 1933 for \$400 an acre. It is now worth at least \$1500.00 an acre.

The nine-hole golf course is situated in a very attractive location with grass greens, shade trees, a pool, and natural springs. ~~Two weeks ago~~ the Board of Public Works authorized Ken ~~Brack~~ ^{Brack}, city recreation director, to enlarge the greens. *the fall of 1947*

The trees are very beautiful. Some of them are old and dying now. ^{So} New trees should be planted to replace them.

A number of ovens with tables and benches are scattered throughout for picnic parties. Five additional ovens were authorized for purchase ~~this past~~ ^{the} summer of 1947

The manager of this park from the beginning until his death in 1946 was J. L. Orndorff. He will always be remembered for his deep interest in Covington Woods and its use by the city.

Riverview Park and the Water Works

"All that portion of a lot of ground lying along First Street in Bowling Green and at its intersection with Chestnut Street and whereon is located the Water Works plant, excluding all portions actually needed or utilized for water works purposes or for purposes of a fish hatchery now under a definitely established fence, shall be and is now dedicated as a public park ~~and~~ and playground for the benefit of the people of Bowling Green and of its colored citizens and shall be known and called Riverview Park."

This is where the Water Works plant is located. Along with the discussion of this park at the foot of Chestnut Street, I shall include the data which I have collected concerning our Water Works.

To Dr. T. B. Wright, the first ^{Mayor} ~~mayor~~, are we indebted for our Water Works system. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Davall. During his years of medical practice, he encountered many epidemics of typhoid fever. It must have been to protect the health of his fellow-citizens that he worked out a system to purify the water of the city.

In Collins' History of Kentucky, he refers to the beautiful town of Bowling Green and mentions especially the handsome Court House and Water Works system.

Mayor A. Scott Hines expanded the water system. With a bond issue, he had larger water pipes laid, four to six inch pipes and the present plant erected in 1928.

Mayor John Rodes continued the laying of larger pipes and used the unemployed workmen during the years of the depression to do this work. Water meters were installed during his administration and the sewage system improved. Before that time we had had septic tanks, sinks, and some open sewers, as we can remember.

Mr. Ed Riber is the city's Chief engineer and in charge of the water works. A report from this month says that during the heat wave of September 1947, the city water works pumping station operated on a 24-hour-day basis. If the city continues to grow it will be necessary to enlarge the facilities. The assistant to Mr. Riber showed me through the plant, ~~last Sunday afternoon~~. The sediment basin and the filtration basin lead into wells where chlorine is added. The pure water is then piped to the Reservoir.

Pressure is good all over the city, I think. On College Heights which is nearly as high as Reservoir Hill, Dr. Cherry erected in 1933 a tank on the Western Campus to give sufficient pressure there.

The unfenced section of Riverview Park adjoining the Water Works plant is used by the neighborhood for ball games.

[Larger pipes being laid April, 1948.]

West End Park

"The 19 acres more or less of land at the west end of Tenth street shall be and is now forever dedicated as a public park and playground for the benefit of the people of Bowling Green and the same shall be known and called West End Park. For the present, however, there is excluded from the above the use of a stone quarry and crusher and mound of crushed stone accessible from Eleventh street and which has been and is yet being used for crushing stone in the construction and repair of the public streets and ways of the city. When such use ceases the whole property above-mentioned is dedicated as set out above."

A park and playground is needed on the west side of the railroad. During the second administration of Mr. Scott Hines this plot of 19 acres at the west end of 10th street was purchased.

It has never been developed into a park because almost immediately after its purchase during World War II, the Kenrad Company investigated the adaptability of locating a plant in Bowling Green. To induce the company to locate here and also to help in the manufacture of needed war articles, the city decided to donate acreage needed for the building of a plant.

So no park or playground has yet been developed there though one is badly needed for that section of the city.

THE PLAZA ON SECOND STREET BETWEEN COLLEGE AND CENTER

None has been set up there yet however.

"A center or space running between College and Center streets in Bowling Green and in the line of Second street and which was formerly the beginning of an attempted railroad known as the Bowling Green and Northern, is now forever dedicated as a public space for park and playground purposes. But this is subject to passways on either side of the central strip running between College and Center streets aforesaid."

Since Mayor Callis appointed a Civilian Park and playground Board, the other mayors have continued this appointment. Dr. M. L. Billings is chairman of the committee. The committee ^{has bought} permanent park equipment for ~~the~~ several of the parks. The golf professional, Mr. Ken Beck, is also playground director and he is keenly interested in work with young people. Mr. ~~Leon~~ Cook, a teacher, was appointed assistant director for last summer. Next year they hope to extend the work and give more attention to the work on the river side of town.

People on the West side of the city are very eager to have a playground there. They lost the one destined for them when the Kenrad and General Electric plants secured the site meant for a West-End Park. We should all see that they have another location. Playground work is very beneficial for the morals of our youth.

CONCLUSION

Our park ordinance of 1942, calling for eight parks is excellent. Six of these have been developed. It is hoped that the other two will materialize. Especially is the playground needed for the Western side of the city near the General Electric plant *and for the North or river-side.*

Any interest that we citizens and clubs show in the growth of our park system will help keep the need for them before the city administration.

Margie Nelson.

A paper given before the Samuel Davies Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution October 1947

