

History



1883-1889

The first period extends from 1883 when the town was platted until 1889, shortly after the City incorporation occurred.

Paris Gibson, our City Founder was quoted as saying, "When the City of Great Falls was founded and its plat was recorded in 1883, it was decided at once to set aside for park purposes, certain well located tracts of land within the City limits and to commence the planting of American Elms and other desirable trees..."

The First step in this planning was setting aside a large tract of land between Park Driveway and the Missouri River, extending a mile up from Central Avenue. Although the "park" named Cascade Park (now Gibson Park) was owned and cared for by the Township Company, Paris Gibson was in the forefront in leading the effort to develop a park system.

1889-1900

The Second significant period begins in May 1889 when the City Council accepted as a gift from the Township Company, Margaret, Whittier, and Cascade (Gibson) parks.

In response to this donation, an ordinance was passed authorizing the appointment by the Mayor, of a Park Commission consisting of two citizens and the Mayor. A most important event in this period was a vote April 18, 1894, which authorized the issuance of a \$40,000 bond for the purpose of purchasing future park sites. After much debate, the City Council purchased Sun River Park (Wadsworth) of 273 acres for \$12,000, Highland Park of 90 acres for \$22,500, and Park Island of 48 acres for \$7,500.

1901-1915

The third period starts in 1901, when the Park Board system was authorized by an Act of the Legislature which provided that the governor shall appoint six citizen members as the Board of Park Commissioners.

Under the administration of the Board of Park Commissioners, the Park system prospered with improvements and landscaping of Gibson, Margaret, and Whittier Parks including new sidewalks; improving Morony Park which included the beginning construction of the Natatorium, the City's indoor swimming pool; erection of baseball fields and grandstand (Legion Ball Park) at Black Eagle (Veterans Memorial Park); improvements of Broadwater Bay including a city boat house; planting 5,000-10,000 trees each year; and road work on numerous drives in the City (starting the Boulevard System.)

In addition, the City had acquired primarily through donation the following parks - Block 268 (Memorial Park), Mount Angela (Roosevelt Park), Boston Heights, Block 736 (Kranz), Westside (Rhodes), and Rainbow Park, a 100 acre parcel south of Rainbow Falls.

It is interesting to note that the total expenditures in 1915 for park maintenance and improvements was \$26,901.

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In a policy statement from the First Report of the Board of Park Commissioners in 1915 it stated: "Furnishing Great Falls a natural beauty that would lend her charm to persons retiring from the farm, as well as to those seeking new fields of endeavor where the advantages of a pleasant home life were to be an attractive force, was the incentive of the founders of the City in providing it with ample park system...'City Beautiful' ideas are best added by park development (and boulevard features) and nothing adds more of magnetic force for farmers wanting to move to the City for a home in their retirement and to educate their children than a city of Parks where people own their own homes. No force about the City more keenly stimulates a desire to own a home than beautiful spots for rest and recreation that may be found in a well developed park system."

From these early beginnings to the present park system that includes fifty-three City Parks, the Park and Recreation Department continues to focus on these initial objectives of beautifying the city and providing places and activities for leisure and recreation for our citizens.

Present:

The Park and Recreation Department continues to touch the lives of almost every resident in the City, be it picnicking at Elk's Riverside Park, feeding the ducks at Gibson Pond, boating at Broadwater Bay, playing softball or a round of golf, swimming at one of the municipal pools, or helping plant a tree on Arbor Day, this is and will continue to be one of the most visible departments in the City.

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