

1941

Quincy Park District

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-Mark Twain, 1882

Quincy settlers were thinking about open spaces for public use when Abe Lincoln was a 16-year-old boy living with his father and stepmother in Spenser County, Indiana. The year was 1825. A center square (now Washington Park) was surveyed and designated for "public enjoyment." Not bad, considering the fact that Quincy's first permanent settler, future Illinois Governor John Wood, did not settle the region until 1822,

And, what a rich history this spot has enjoyed: a former Sauk Indian Village, campground for the Mormons on their way to Nauvoo, and the site of a famous Lincoln Douglas debate held in 1858. Today, the Quincy Park District has 1,000 acres of property, within 34 beautiful areas set aside for "public enjoyment."

As far back as 1888, a group of 32 interested Quincy residents formed the Quincy Boulevard and Park Association. A few years after forming, they pushed through a \$1 million public tax levy for the acquisition and maintenance of boulevards and parks. How times have changed; the resulting \$5,000 annual budget has grown to almost \$5,000,000.

During the early years, the association worked closely with the city of Quincy to acquire several properties for public park use. The first park, Madison Park (8.5 acres), was an abandoned cemetery and still boasts of several beautiful trees planted in the 1840s.

The association had the "modern" forethought to hire a landscape architect (then called a landscape gardener) to "horticulturally" design the park. They contacted none other than Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of New York City's Central Park, to ask him to be the Madison Park gardener. Some "gardener!" Olmsted was not available, but recommended H.W.S. Cleveland, another well-known gardener at the time. Madison Park was improved to

Cleveland's specifications. The remaining parks at the time were all designed and planted by Chicago's renown O.C. Simmonds.

In 1891, the 32-member association purchased beautiful property on the bluffs of Quincy, overlooking the Mississippi River. Today, 16-acre Riverview Park has the character of a "Victorian" park, with brick walkways, stone walls along the vista and ornamental landscaping.

A new era emerged in 1941 with the establishment of the Quincy Park District. From 1945 to 1977, the district's board of commissioners was served by the same five members. This 32-year period of uncanny consistency was known as the "The Long Board" period. All five commissioners have been honored by having significant parks or major facilities named after them.

"The Long Board" proved to be a busy and dedicated group of volunteer commissioners. Also, the same consulting engineer, William H. Klingner, served during this period and continues to serve the present board of commissioners. More than 700 acres of park property were acquired during this time and selective capital development provided a host of diversified recreation and park opportunities still being enjoyed by residents.

Westview Golf Course, a regulation 27-hole PGA rated course, is probably the most noteworthy single facility developed during the Long Board. Westview opened to the public in 1946, and today consists of over 175 acres of pristine, heavily wooded fairways and gentle slopes which accommodate a heavy public use of 60,000 rounds a year.

Mark Twain would not recognize Quincy's riverfront today. Located just a few miles upstream from Tom Sawyer's Hannibal, Mo., Mark Twain looked forward to his visits to Quincy and recorded in 1882 that Quincy "had the aspect and ways of a model New England town; broad clean streets, trim neat dwellings and lawns, fine mansions, stately blocks of commercial buildings and there are ample fairgrounds, a well-kept park, and many attractive drives...."

If he were to visit today, he would also, no doubt, record his observations of a beautiful riverfront made possible by a string of well-maintained riverfront parks extending for over a lush landscape of 1.5 miles. Although he would not see the nearly 3,000 riverboats which would pass by on an annual basis in his day, the occasional passenger riverboat still can be seen as it passes by Bicentennial Park, Kesler Park, All-America Park, Edgewater Park, Villa Katherine Park with its own fabulous Moorish Casde and the park districts 130-acre Quinsippi Island, with its 258-boat slip marina and village.

Much of the park property along Quincy's riverfront was acquired in the 1950s; however, development, in earnest, did not start until after the completion of a "Riverfront Renaissance" Study completed of 1989.

Today the Quincy Park District continues the legacy of the past with an active and progressive eye to the future. The districts Comprehensive Plan presents a challenging vision through the year 2020. The vision recognizes that the future of the Quincy Park District relies upon the involvement by all its citizens.

◆ *by Stephen H. Carpenter, executive director of the Quincy Park District*