

SMITH PARK

HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

In 1897, Elisha Dickinson Smith donated 23 acres of heavily wooded property between "The Avenue" (Nicolet Boulevard), and Cleveland, Keyes and Park Streets to the City of Menasha "for the purpose of promoting health, pleasure and well-being of said City of Menasha, and the inhabitants thereof".

Following the formal presentation and acceptance of the deed by the City Council, there was "the greatest public demonstration ever witnessed in Menasha". People gathered in the square with two bands, and the crowd marched to the Smith house on the island. The Smith family greeted the cheering group, and several prominent city officials spoke in thanks for the gift of the park.

Olaf Benson of Chicago, who had designed Lincoln Park there, was hired to lay out the gardens and walks in the new park. When it was completed, the park became the pride of Menasha. Although the years have brought many changes, it is still a beautifully serene and elegant spot for children's play, romantic weddings, social gatherings or leisurely walks.

This map will help the visitor to view the park the way it was many years ago, and to understand some of its changes.

THE MEMORIAL BUILDING

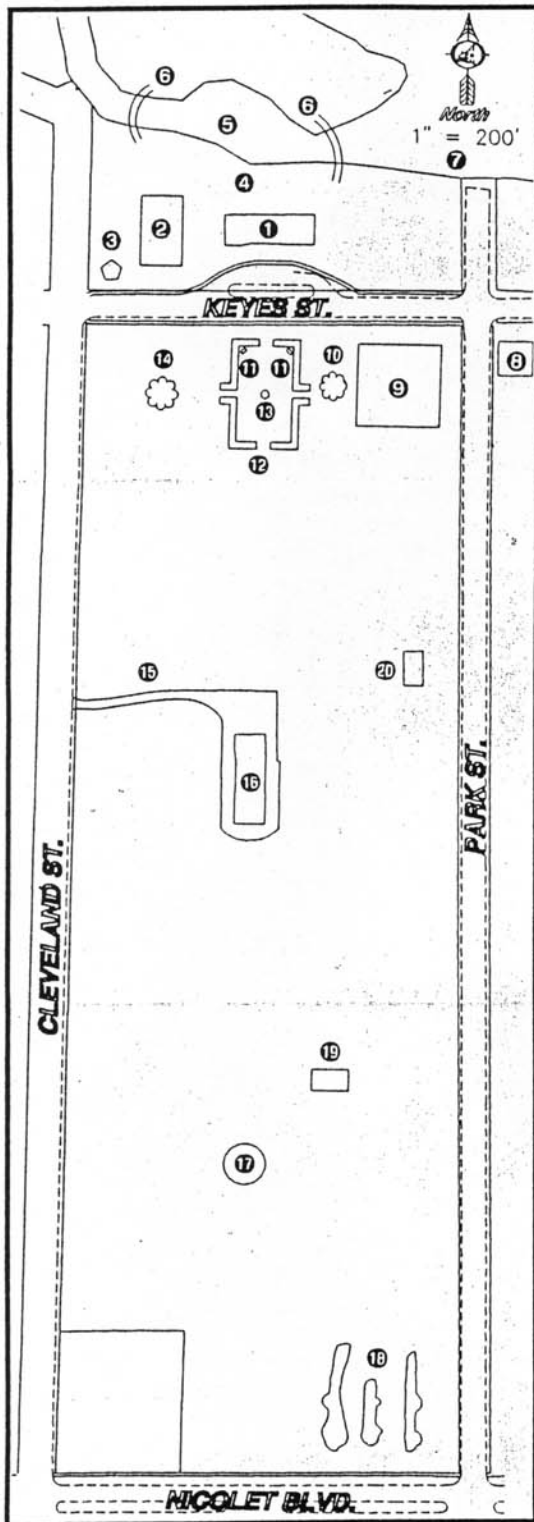


Home of the Menasha Historical Society Resource Center



SMITH
PARK
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1 MEMORIAL BUILDING Affectionately known to generations of young people as "The Mem", this structure was built in 1928 as a memorial to those who gave their lives in World War I. Over the years it has had many uses: Recreation Department offices, changing facilities for swimmers, game rooms for teens, card room for retired men, and dances for young people. Presently, it houses the Menasha Historical Society resource center, Park and Recreation Department classes, square dancing groups, club meetings and pre-school programs.

2 TENNIS COURT This was the very first public court in the city and the only one for a number of years.

3 NICOLET MONUMENT This memorial was donated by the Menasha Women's Club and dedicated in 1906 to Jean Nicolet. He was the first white man to set foot in this area when he met the Indians near this spot in 1634.

4 PLAY AREA The space between the tennis court and the lagoon was sandy and had a slide, swings and teeter-totter for small children. During the hot summer days, young mothers brought their little ones here for the afternoon.

5 LAGOON AND FOUNTAIN This shallow pool between the bridges with a spraying fountain in the center was a wonderful place for small tots to splash and play while mothers kept a watchful eye.

6 BRIDGES These two arched bridges on either side of the wading pool have been the locale for thousands of graduation, wedding, birthday, anniversary or any other special occasion pictures. The background was always beautiful regardless of the season.

7 "SWIMMING HOLE" In the 1930's, there was a raft anchored along the shore of the river and another in the river. These were located where the boat stalls are at the present time. Eventually, this summer pastime was banned.

8 E.D. SMITH'S HOUSE In 1864, Mr. Smith built a house at this location. He and his family lived there until his death. The house stood empty for many years. A caretaker lived in it for a few years, and it was finally razed.

9 TENNIS COURTS These courts were very special when first built because they had lights! The Recreation Department took reservations for them so everyone had a chance. For a few winters, the city flooded them for ice skating. However, this raised havoc with the court surface, so it was stopped.

10 MEMORIAL PLAQUE This plaque was placed here by the Order of the Eastern Star in memory of Paul Friedland and Duane Gear who were killed in World War II.

11 BENCHES In October, 1996, these two marble benches were erected and dedicated in memory of Florence and John Wilterding. She had been president of the historical society for many years.

12 FLOWER GARDENS These gardens have long been known as one of the best municipal floral displays in Central Wisconsin. Nearly 10,000 annuals bloom from early spring until late autumn.

13 LITTLE BOY FOUNTAIN This statue was donated to the city by the Dr. A. B. Jensen family. It had stood in the dining room of the Hotel Menasha when the family owned the hotel and resided there.

14 UNITED NATIONS TREE This red maple, symbolizing blood lost by those who fought and died in search of peace, was planted in 1955 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the United Nations.

15 MEMORIAL TREES Over the years trees have been planted along this road into the park by friends and relatives of people whom they wished to remember. A list of names is in the pavilion.

16 PAVILION The first pavilion, an eight-sided building with drop shutters and a dance floor, was erected in the early days of the park and was long the center of activities. When the original floor deteriorated, the building was replaced by the present structure. The new shelter, dedicated in 1961, was a gift from the Gilbert Paper Company Foundation. For six decades, park dances here were among the most popular activities in the Fox Valley. They were discontinued in 1980, and the building is presently used for group activities and picnics.

17 AMPHITHEATRE This was built by the city for use by theatrical groups, and the Winnebago Players used it several times. Today, all that remains is a curved metal strip that once held the footlights and the stone steps. Today the hill is used mostly for sledding and skiing.

18 INDIAN MOUNDS At the turn of the century, sixteen Indian mounds could be identified between Smith and Doty Parks. All but three were leveled by farmers and home builders. They are believed to be panther mounds built by the Oneoto Indians about 800 A.D. The largest mound is 26" high and 125" long. Originally they were probably 6' high.

19 CLINTON SCHOOL Between 1878 and 1894 the island school, named for Reverend O.P. Clinton, stood on the site of the present soccer field. A painting of the school can be seen at the Elisha D. Smith Public Library.

20 CABOOSE This railroad caboose was presented to the Menasha Historical Society by the Soo Line Railroad in 1972 and commemorates the fact that Menasha was once a major railroad terminal for loggers and farmers and was the birthplace of the Wisconsin Central Railroad. The protective shelter for the caboose was provided by George Banta, Jr.