

## Forest Park in St. Louis

Forest Park was created in 1874 when the Missouri legislature passed an ordinance to establish three parks in St. Louis County; Carondelet Park, Forest Park and O'Fallon Park. Forest Park received this name because most of the land was originally virgin forest. When the park became part of the city in 1875, the primary concern was to create easy public access. The Wabash railroad ran to the northwest corner of the park and was a twenty minute ride from downtown. While this facilitated the public's reaching the park grounds, many roads and bridges had to be built to accommodate traffic inside the park as well. In addition, numerous artificial lakes were built and extensive landscaping was done prior to the park's dedication on June 26, 1876.

Forest Park was designed by Maximillian G. Kern, the park superintendent and landscape gardener. In its beginnings, only the eastern portion of the park was developed. Winding drives and waterways, bandstands, pagodas and picnic grounds were scattered around the lakes. During the 1893 depression, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* began a campaign to build a lake bearing its name in the park to help with unemployment. This one-year project gave jobs to several thousand workers and provided a boating facility to the public.

In 1897 an Amateur Athletic Association was formed and they built a clubhouse, tennis courts, baseball diamonds and a 9-hole golf course. The original park plan recommended building a zoo and by 1890, park employees were caring for an animal collection that included deer, geese, prairie dogs and quail in an animal enclosure. The park soon had its own herd of buffalo, elk, a dromedary and a zebu. The city built animal houses and bear pits in 1899 and 1901. The city's first art museum opened downtown in 1881 and by 1897 the museum board asked the city's permission to build a new art museum for the city in Forest Park.

The centennial of the Louisiana Purchases provided the momentum to truly develop the park. Forest Park was chosen as the site for the 1904 World's Fair and the main hall of the Saint Louis Art Museum was created as a permanent building to be given to the city as a new city museum after the closing of the Fair.

The park was further developed during the depression through numerous WPA projects, including buildings for the Municipal Opera and the Jewel Box. In addition, the WPA also provided jobs building waterfalls and floral displays, for improved lakes, to and to create cooking facilities for picnics and comfort stations. While there is no specific documentation of tree planting, this painting may well depict an actual occurrence funded by the WPA. Forest Park thrived during the depression from the allocation of WPA funds and many improvements were made to the park during this time.

Links to learn more:

<http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/parks/forestpark/> City of St. Louis Forest Park website