

McCormick Urged Village Park District

System Started With Land Made From Dredging of North Shore Channel

The Wilmette park district owes its inception to Col. Robert R. McCormick, now editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune.

That was the contention of the late Louis K. Gillson, president of the board of park commissioners from 1908 to 1934.

Early in 1906, the Sanitary District of Chicago, with Colonel McCormick as president, developed plans for the district's North Shore channel, harbor basin, and pumping station at Sheridan road in Wilmette. The canal was to provide another link in the chain of waterways connecting Lake Michigan with the Gulf of Mexico. The sanitary district had just reversed the flow of the Chicago river and its south branch so that they flowed into the Ship and Sanitary canal and thus into the Des Plaines and Illinois rivers, and, by pumping water from the lake up into the North Shore channel, that reverse flow was maintained.

"In the fall of 1907," Mr. Gillson's account in his "Graphic Historical Sketch of Progress" written in 1934, says, "while negotiations were pending relative to the construction of a link of the drainage canal to connect the lake with the north branch of the Chicago river and to pass through Wilmette and Evanston, Colonel McCormick delivered an address before the Wilmette Men's club.

"In the course of this address, after stating the location of the channel it was proposed to excavate, he added that all of the spoil removed in the work done east of the North Western railroad would be dumped into the lake between Washington avenue and the proposed inlet of the canal.

"It was estimated that there would be created approximately 22 acres of 'made land', which would become the property of the State of Illinois.

"He then suggested that, inasmuch as the law provided that unoccupied 'made land' lying within the boundaries of an organized park district might be taken possession of by such district for park purposes, the citizens of Wilmette would do well to organize such a district and thus acquire without cost a substantial site for a park."

Villagers, acting on Colonel McCormick's advice, voted to create such a park district in 1908. The original commissioners were, besides Mr. Gillson, the Rev. E. J. Vattman, David Maney, Horace G. Drury, and P. J. Cuneen.

The district included all of Wilmette at that time. The western boundary was the center line of Ridge road. In addition, the triangle along the lake shore between Wilmette and Kenilworth, then called "Oklahoma" and later known as "No Man's Land," as well as a portion of North Evanston were

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Preface and Dedication

This supplement is issued as WILMETTE LIFE's contribution to the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the incorporation of the Village of Wilmette.

'It is dated September 18, 1947, one day before the exact anniversary.

Gathered in these pages are stories and pictures of the community's life for 75 years. Here, too, are records of earlier events: the Mission of the Guardian Angel, the Ouilmette reservation, the Great Migration from Old Trier to New Trier.

For Wilmette's history stems not alone from the land grant to Archange Ouilmette and the real estate enterprises of Henry A. Dingee and John G. Westerfield. It stems also from the community along the ridge. Gross Point was settled well over a century ago, became a village in 1874, and was merged with Wilmette in 1924 and 1926.

This is not meant to be a definitive history of the village. Even this large book does not contain enough space to tell all there is to be told, and the year which has been devoted to research and writing has been too short to complete the job.

The History of Wilmette is still to be written.

Wilmette is yet making history. Still a community of homes, it is within the power of its citizens to keep it so, to plan successfully for a better community for ourselves, for our children, for our children's children.

The purposes of this volume are these: to acquaint the citizens of the village with something of the story of their community; to stimulate interest in that history; to arouse a feeling of civic pride and responsibility; to accelerate the establishment of a community historical collection; and to set down, for the historians of the future, some of the great Story of Wilmette.

Without the cooperation of those who recorded the histories of the village's civic, philanthropic, and religious organizations; without the aid of Mrs. John A. Hoffmann, Mrs. Lorin A. Bower, Mrs. William N. Waidner, Paul Nanzig, Nicholas P. Miller, Walter Zibble, and Miss Mary Helen Troy, and many others, this volume would never have been completed.

Without the assistance and guidance of Miss Helen Siniff, James D. W. Kline, and Herbert B. Mulford, it would never have been started.

Due and ample credit should be given to Miss Mary Kate Patterson, who performed much of the research, and to Mrs. Richard Howell, Harvey Steffens, and Tom Kerwin, who took many of the pictures.

Traditionally, a work of this character should have some dedication. Let this be it:

To those who have handed down to us all the fine and beautiful things of this village; to those who today keep it fine and beautiful; to those who now plan for its future enrichment; to those who will enjoy its life in the days to come; and to all those good citizens who, having an understanding and appreciation of the Spirit of Wilmette, are resolved to transmit this village to others even finer than it was transmitted to them, this volume is dedicated.

Lombard Dusham Built Log Cabin On Shore in 1837

One of Wilmette's earliest settlers was Lombard Dusham, who came to the area about 1837 and purchased 100 acres from Antoine Ouilmette just north of the Ouilmette family reservation, at 10 cents an acre.

Lombard Dusham (the name, it is believed, was originally Du Charme) built himself a log cabin near the present intersection of Elmwood and Michigan avenues. He cleared the land, began farming, and, two years later, sent for his wife. There his sons, John L. Sr. and Max were born.

Some of his best corn fields were along the lake shore, although, since there was no beach in those days, a northeast storm would often tumble large areas of land into the water. Some of the land was later sold to members of the Gage family.

From Ship Wreck

He built a corn crib, so the story goes, from wreckage of the Lady Elgin which washed ashore.

Lombard Dusham was active in the early civic life of the township and served as overseer of high-

ways in 1860 and 1861. His son, Max, held the same position from 1870 to 1877 and from 1880 to 1881.

John L. Dusham, Sr. built a home near the site of the cabin in 1872, the year after his son, John L., Jr., was born in the cabin.

The latter, now retired from the United States Steel company, has been a life-long resident of the village. He lives at 503 Park avenue. Mrs. Dusham, the former Miss Elizabeth Neithaver, came to Wilmette as a girl.

Their children are Howard F., 1616 Forest avenue; John N., 1622 Wilmette avenue; Mrs. Katherine Thorpe, 524 Park avenue; and the late James C. Dusham.

This Isn't All

The 120 pages in this book were not enough to contain all the stories written for this anniversary issue. Necessarily, some of them have had to be printed in Section I, the regular edition for this week, instead of in Section II, the part devoted exclusively to Wilmette history.

Township Was Organized by Voters in '50

Great Skokie Marsh Once Blocked Farm and Residential Expansion

New Trier, a "fractional" township of a little over 17 square miles, was organized in 1850.

None of the five villages which were later to spring up in the township (Winnetka and Glencoe in 1869, Wilmette in 1872, Gross Point in 1874, and Kenilworth in 1896) had been organized. The forest territory along the shore was being gradually cleared for home sites, and along the ridge, farmers were acquiring their holdings.

Along the west edge of the township lay the Skokie marsh: in wet weather a large lake whose surface was 40 feet above that of Lake Michigan; in dry weather a treacherous mire. It was a feeding station, spring and fall, for migrating birds, and it was a great breeding place for mosquitoes.

No roads invaded the marsh. Lake avenue was to skirt it on the south; Dundee road on the north; Hibbard road on the east.

Where Indian Hill estates, Kenilworth Gardens, and the western part of Kenilworth itself now lie, was, a century ago, unconquerable wilderness.

The Skokie drained into the three forks of the north branch of the Chicago river, but in no season was the stream adequate to drain away the waters.

Under the marsh lie peat bogs. A long, dry summer spell was enough to set them afire, and great clouds of smoke would rise over the marshes and roll down on the countryside at the will of the wind.

Gradually the farm lands encroached upon the fringes of the marsh. The Skokie ditch, later called the Kenilworth ditch, was one of the ambitious attempts to drain the waters of the Skokie into Lake Michigan. For the most part, however, the settlers were able to reclaim only a few acres.

It was not until the Civilian Conservation Corps was organized that any major and comprehensive plan for the solution of the problem of the marsh was adopted, although many far-seeing citizens of the township, including Frank A. Windes of Winnetka, had been advocating the drainage of the Skokie for years. The CCC completed its work just before World War II and now the marsh has been transformed into a series of lagoons set in a park-like surrounding.

Citizens of the then rural township met in April, 1850, at the home of John Garland in what is now Winnetka, to organize the new township. As explained elsewhere in this issue, they chose the name "New Trier" because so many of the inhabitants had come from old Trier in Germany.

As stated above, the township has an area of a little over 17 square miles. The Illinois average is about

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