

4. PARK HISTORY

KE WINGRA

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

This section includes an historical summary, landscape chronology, and a site plan that identifies key historic and cultural resources within the park. The historical summary includes a context for understanding Vilas Park within the larger City of Madison park system, as well as a history of the naming of the park, key designers, and major changes over time. The summary also includes a brief narrative of the park's historic significance, including the Vilas Park Mound Group listing in the National Register, and the potential listing of Vilas Park for its local significance in the history of Madison, the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association, and potential significance for its landscape architecture design of the early 20th century.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The place that would become Vilas Park was originally a wetland marsh along the shore of Lake Wingra, with a ridge of high ground to the east. The natural landscape provided habitat for nesting birds and fish, and the marshy ground supported the cultivation of wild rice by indigenous people. Beginning circa 700 AD through 1200 AD, earthen mounds were constructed on the ridge overlooking the lake. These included two bird effigies, a linear mound, and 8 conical mounds (as identified by Increase A. Lapham in 1850). The exact purpose and meaning of the mounds is unknown, but they are part of a much larger pattern of mound building that was prevalent in the Four Lakes region. This region was home to the Ho-Chunk Nation when American settlers arrived in the 1800s. The Ho-Chunk camped adjacent to Lake Wingra even as the city of Madison began to develop.

After the City of Madison was established in the 1830s and the urban population swelled, interest grew to develop scenic carriage drives and parks in and around the city. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, a horse-drawn carriage ride through the countryside was a favorite recreational activity. Often the roads were designed to emphasize a leisurely tour along a scenic route, referred to as “pleasure drives.” The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association (MPPDA) was established in 1894, to raise private funds for this purpose. Beginning with Tenney Park in 1899, the MPPDA quickly established other parks within the city.

Vilas Park was created out of a gift from Senator William Freeman Vilas and his wife Anna M. Vilas who donated 25 acres to the MPPDA to develop their land adjacent Lake Wingra as a park. The deed contained certain conditions that required the association to “within two years, cause a waterway to be constructed between Lakes Monona and Wingra.”¹ The park was to be named Henry Vilas Park, in memory of the couple's

¹ Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1905.

son Henry who died young due to complications from diabetes. The Vilas' stipulated that the association, or eventually the city, would never be able to charge an admission fee. Community members quickly raised additional funds to enlarge and improve the park.

The MPPDA hired prominent Chicago-based landscape architect Ossian Cole (O.C.) Simonds to develop a plan for the park. His design incorporated a series of lagoons and islands to drain the marshy land. A pump was used to bring sand up from the bottom of Lake Wingra and fill the bog, bringing the total acreage of the park to 65 acres. The lagoon was complemented by a sweeping open meadow, playground, picnic area, and pleasure drive that circled the park. Simonds' design was in the emerging Prairie Style of landscape architecture that was inspired by nature, informed by local landforms, and used indigenous plant materials.

The park was modified in 1911 when the Henry Vilas Zoo was officially opened. It was established on 28 acres, carved out of the original park space. The zoo has gradually expanded in size since that time. In 1925, the Annie Stewart Fountain was completed as a pedestrian entrance feature, dedicated to Annie C. Stewart (1867 to 1905) who engaged in charitable activities in Madison. By 1937, the park's recreational amenities were well-established, and included tennis courts, ballfields, hockey rink, sand beach, boat launch, and playgrounds.

In the mid-1950s, a new master plan for the park would modify Simonds' original design over the next two decades. The lagoon was reduced in size to its current configuration, with the largest island being connected to the mainland. This modification accommodated a zoo expansion and additional parking in the southeast corner of the park. The Vilas Park Shelter was added to the large island in the 1950s, with adjacent parking. More recently, the park has added a basketball court, beach restroom facility, additional zoo exhibits, and additional parking along Vilas Park Drive.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Vilas Park Mound Group is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as locally significant under Criterion D, for its ability to provide important information on the Late Woodland stage in southcentral and southwestern Wisconsin. The mounds are significant as one of the relatively few surviving Late Woodland mound groups in the Madison lakes area of Dane County.² The mound group is protected under Wisconsin state law as a protected burial place. The mounds are culturally important to contemporary indigenous groups, who continue to care for this ancestral ground.

² Vilas Park Mound Group, National Register of Historic Places Registration, 1991.

Vilas Park is important for its association with the park planning and design movement in the City of Madison. The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association was “the most influential voluntary organization in Madison’s history.”³ From 1894 to 1938, the organization transformed Madison into a city with a wealth of parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, beaches and open space. The MPPDA changed the physical development and environmental character of Madison, and Vilas Park, as the second park in Madison, is part of that legacy. Vilas Park was established on the condition that no fee ever be charged for admission, and with this precedent, the development of public parks in the city grew with hundreds of citizens donating small annual gifts to the designation and improvement of public land.

The MPPDA set high aesthetic standards, hiring talented landscape architect O.C. Simonds. The park retains many components of his original design, including the lagoon, small island, large meadow, picnic areas, playground, and the organically curving carriage drive around much of the perimeter. The park retains its connection to the Prairie Style in landscape architecture, evidenced by native plant material placed in naturalistic groupings and picturesque views across the water and meadow. The park was designed to connect to other parks and drives in the city, as part of John Nolen’s 1911 comprehensive design for Madison’s parks (Figure 4.1). Today this network of parks and greenways that continues to enrich the lives of Madisonians.

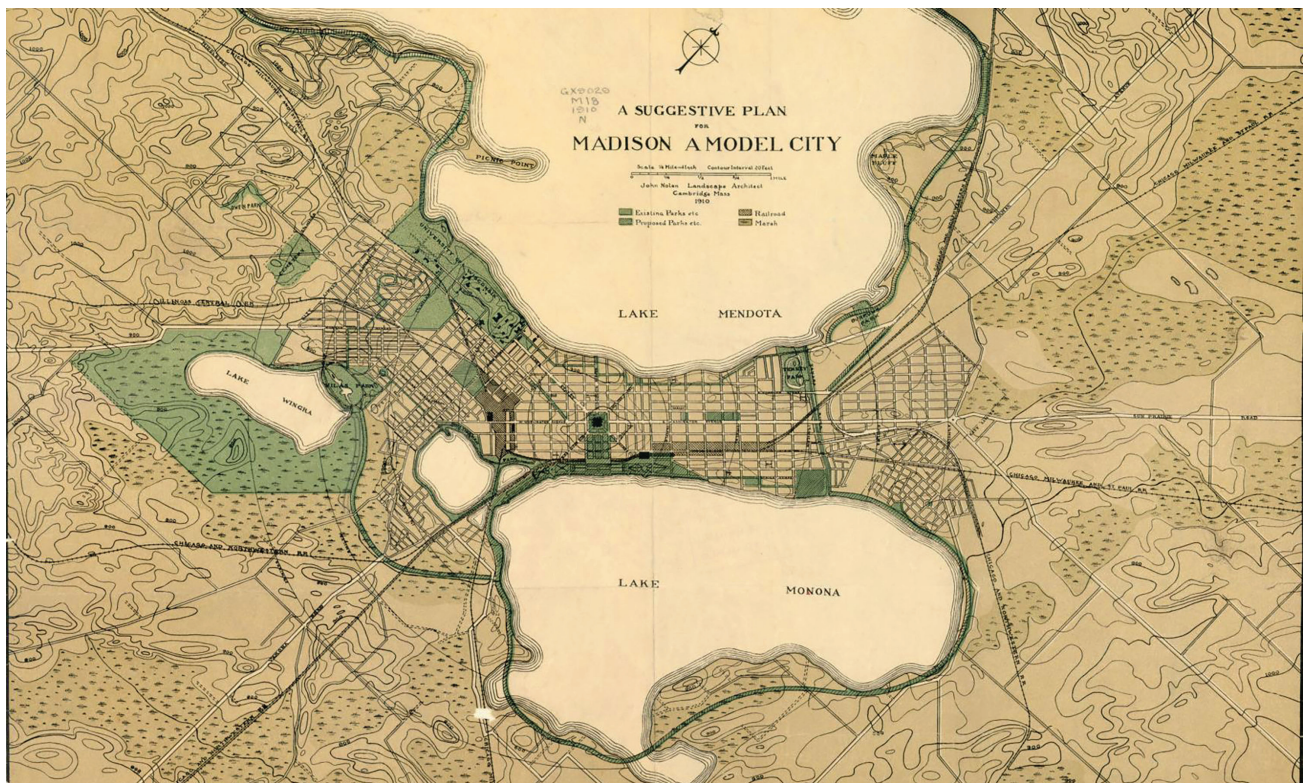


Figure 4.1. John Nolen’s plan for the City of Madison 1910 (Wisconsin Historical Society, 100762)

3 City of Madison Landmarks Commission, Tenney Park Landmark Nomination, City of Madison, 1994.

CHRONOLOGY

pre 700 AD - Madison is situated within the Eastern Ridges and Lowlands physiographic province. The topography is affected by ridges of resistant Paleozoic sedimentary rock ridges overlying a softer layer of less resistant bedrock, or cuestas. In Madison two resistant formations, the Galena-Black River and Lower Magnesian, alternate with the weaker St. Peters and Potsdam formations. Erosion caused by weathering, streams, underground water and wind have worn layers of the rock to some extent. Glaciation has had more dramatic effects.⁴ The topography of the four lakes region was formed by the retreat of the glaciers approximately 13,000 years ago.

700 – 1200 AD ca. – Indigenous oral history and archeology document the presence of humans in the Madison region extending to the last glacial period. While people of European descent believe humans have been in the region for over 12 thousand years, Indigenous historians avoid dating human occupation. Most Wisconsin Indian nations’ origin stories relay that the tribes have been here since “the beginning of time.”⁵

During the transitional periods the Indigenous inhabitants witnessed many changes to the landscape and environment. As the glaciers receded, the mega-fauna and flora present for thousands of years were replaced by plants and animals previously unknown in the region. As the environment changed, humans adapted by studying and learning from the new conditions. Efficient utilization of plants and animals allowed ancient people to survive and thrive, becoming rich in population and culture. Today’s modern American Indians are descendants of these ancient civilizations.⁶

The tradition of mound building in the region initiated during a time when people become less mobile and larger communities came together to live in semi-permanent camps. People continued hunting and gathering but supplemented this with harvesting wild plants and gardening more intensively. Burial mounds tended to be located on elevated bluffs or near major bodies of water, while villages were often located to provide access to water and other resources. Madison had an especially high concentration of Indigenous mounds.

In no region of a similar area in the state are there to be found so great a number of ancient Indian earthworks as in that about the three lakes surrounding the city of Madison. Every attractive point or sweep of shoreline about these beautiful bodies of water is or was once the site of a group of mounds.

4 L. Martin, The Physical Geography of Wisconsin. Third Edition. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, 221.

5 Patty Loew, Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal, Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2013, 2-3.

6 William Quackenbush, “Traditional Use of the Landscape by American Indians,” in National Park Service, Effigy Mounds National Monument Cultural Landscape Report, 2016, 2.3-2.4.

Although many of these remarkable earthen monuments have now been needlessly destroyed, a large number of them yet remain to interest all who may desire to become acquainted with the archaeological history of the site of Madison.⁷

American Indians constructed mounds on a ridge overlooking the northeastern edge of Lake Wingra (future intersection of Erin and Wingra Streets). It originally consisted of eleven low (1 to 3 ½ feet) earthen mounds. These included two bird effigies, one linear mound, and eight conical mounds.⁸ Most of what was then Vilas Park was a marsh, providing habitat for fish, birds, small game, and wild rice. Indigenous peoples lived in small villages and migrated from one to another based on the seasonal availability of natural resources.⁹

The Ho-Chunk, Hochungra, people have lived in Wisconsin for thousands of years. Their name means “People of the Big Voice” or “People of the Sacred Language.”¹⁰ The Ho-Chunk believe they originated at Moga-Shooch (Red Banks), on the south shore of Green Bay, the deep notch between thumb and fingers on today’s map of Wisconsin.¹¹ Their homelands extended from upper Michigan to southern Wisconsin. Prior to European contact, the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odaawa) began moving into Ho-Chunk territory along the shores of the Great Lakes.¹² The movement of the Anishinaabe pushed the Ho-Chunk to the south. Around 1570 part of the tribe moved into Iowa, and would eventually become the Iowa, Oto, and Missouri tribes. The remaining Ho-Chunk in Wisconsin concentrated into large villages near Green Bay for defensive purposes. The tribe was vulnerable to encroachment as a result of population decline and economic dependence on European trade goods that developed through participation in the fur trade.¹³

1800’s - The Louisiana Purchase dramatically expanded American territory. Ho-Chunk homeland that was previously at the western edge of the United States, was now in the middle of the US territory. As larger numbers of Europeans trespassed on their territory, the Ho-Chunk joined forces with Tecumseh in an attempt to repulse white encroachment in the Ohio Valley.¹⁴

7 Charles E. Brown, “Prehistoric Indian Monuments on the University Grounds.” The Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, 15 (9): 383

8 Vilas Park Mound Group, National Register of Historic Places Registration, 1991.

9 Steven Verburg, “Yahara lakes were home to dense and most varied native mounds.” Wisconsin State Journal, August 1, 2018. Accessed 8/7/2019, madison.com/wsj/news/local/environment/yahara-lakes-were-home-to-dense-and-most-varied-native

10 Ho-Chunk Nation Heritage Preservation Department, The HoChunk Nation: A Brief History, Black River Falls: WI, The Ho-Chunk Nation, n.d.

11 Ho-Chunk Nation Heritage Preservation Department, The HoChunk and Green Lake, Black River Falls: WI, The Ho-Chunk Nation, n.d.

12 Patty Loew, Indian Nations of Wisconsin, 2013, 45

13 Patty Loew, Indian Nations of Wisconsin, 2013, 44-46

14 Patty Loew, Indian Nations of Wisconsin, 2013, 46

1820's - Removal of the Ho-Chunk begins. The 1825 Peace and Friendship Treaty was signed at Prairie du Chien, with hopes that firm boundaries would be established, protecting the rights of the tribal nations of the region. This was not the case, and tensions continued to mount as encroachments multiplied.¹⁵

1832 – The Ho-Chunk offered shelter to the Sauk peoples during the Black Hawk War and were punished for their compassion. They were forced to cede lands south of the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers to the Rock River, including De Jope (Madison) and were removed to Iowa and Minnesota. But some members of the Ho-Chunk nation did not leave their homeland, and others returned as soon as they could.¹⁶

1894 – The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association (MPPDA) incorporated and raised private funds to develop and maintain scenic carriage drives and parks in and around Madison. Over the next 44 years the organization developed popular city parks including Tenney Park, Vilas Park, Brittingham Park, Glenway Golf Course, and Olin Park.

1889 - The Wingra Park neighborhood was the first of Madison's modern suburbs to be created in response to residents' desires to escape the increasingly crowded conditions on the Isthmus. The 106-acre farm purchased for the neighborhood was a largely open, well-drained property that adjoined the western edge of the city. Sales of the lots were slow at first, stalled by a slow national economy and lack of street car service.¹⁷

1902 – A Sanborn Insurance map indicates that the property that would become Vilas Park was platted with a grid of streets, just outside Madison City limits.¹⁸

1903 - By 1903 the Wingra Park neighborhood was connected to downtown by a streetcar service and had electric streetlights installed. It was considered one of Madison's finest residential districts.¹⁹

1904 – Senator William Freeman Vilas and his wife Anna M. Vilas contributed \$18,000 to the MPPDA for the purchase of land for a park. It was named in memory of the couple's son, Henry, who died at a young age five years earlier due to complications from diabetes.²⁰ William Vilas moved to Madison when he was ten years old. He studied at the University of Wisconsin and received a degree in law from the Albany,

¹⁵ Patty Loew, *Indian Nations of Wisconsin*, 2013, 48-49

¹⁶ Patty Loew, *Indian Nations of Wisconsin*, 2013, 49-51

¹⁷ City of Madison, *Neighborhood Profiles*. Accessed 8/7/2019, www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/national-register-of-historic-places/1602/

¹⁸ Sanborn Insurance Company, *Map of City of Madison*, 1902.

¹⁹ City of Madison, *Neighborhood Profiles*. Accessed 8/7/2019, www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/national-register-of-historic-places/1602/

²⁰ Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association Report, 1904. Accessed 8/7/2019, digital.library.wisc.edu/1771dl/WI.JohnOlinArchives

New York Law School. After serving in the Civil War, he returned to Madison to begin a successful law practice, teach at the University of Wisconsin Law School, serve in the State Assembly and on the University Board of Regents. In 1884, President Cleveland appointed Mr. Vilas Postmaster General and three years later Secretary of the Department of The Interior. He was elected United States Senator in 1890. Of his many civic commitments, the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association benefited with his donation to establish Henry Vilas Park²¹

In 1904, the MPPDA hired O.C. Simonds to develop a plan for Henry Vilas Park. Between 1904 and 1906 he developed 3 plans for Vilas Park (Figure 4.2), due to the variable site conditions. When the land for the park was purchased, the 25 acres of high ground was separated from the lake by a bog. “It was the plan to covert the whole of this bog into park area, but careful examination disclosed that some fifteen acres of it was underlaid by soft material to such depth as to make the filling of it impractical.”²² Simonds’ plan was to create a series of lagoons to manage the water, and to convert portions of the bog into dry parkland.²³



Figure 4.2. O.C. Simonds’ plan for Vilas Park, 1904
(City of Madison Parks Division)

The lagoons and islands along the shoreline of Lake Wingra would be connected by bridges with a circular drive around the entire park. The plan called for native plants in large groupings, including “Pin Oaks and

21 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1904.

22 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1905.

23 Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association Report, 1904. Accessed 8/7/2019, digital.library.wisc.edu/1771dl/WI.JohnOlinArchives

Wild Roses” and “Ceanothus among trees with herb plants, white clover, wild strawberries, etc.” The plan also included a wading pool, playground, picnic area, and lily pond.²⁴

1905 – In January 1905, Simonds revised the plan for Henry Vilas Park (Figure 4.3). The revised plan included Edgewood Park to the southwest at the edge of Lake Wingra. The lagoons seen in the earlier plan were removed in favor of a large island, separated from the mainland by a sinuous channel of water. Plantings indicated were similar to the previous plan, with willows, “native alders,” “wild gooseberries,” and “red branched dogwood.”²⁵



Figure 4.3. O.C. Simonds’ plan for Vilas Park, 1905
(City of Madison Parks Division)

In the spring of 1905, construction had begun on Henry Vilas Park. The La Crosse Dredging company commenced work filling the bog of Lake Wingra. During construction, the location of the lagoons was modified from the plans, adding an extra 3 or 4 acres along the outer shoreline.²⁶

1906 – Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association acknowledges the gift from Mary C. Stewart to be used in construction and erecting as some appropriate place within the City of Madison a drinking fountain in memory of her deceased daughter Annie C. Stewart.²⁷

24 O.C. Simonds Landscape Gardeners, Plan of Henry Vilas Park, Madison Wisconsin, July 20, 1904.

25 O.C. Simonds Landscape Gardeners, Plan of Henry Vilas Park, Madison Wisconsin, January 1905.

26 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1906.

27 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1906.

1906 – In March of 1906, the Park and Pleasure Drive Association paid \$146.75 to Simonds for a “new design for Henry Vilas Park”²⁸ (Figure 4.4). Simonds revised the plan for the park to reflect the actual location, shape and size of lagoons and size and outline of the park that occurred during construction. The design was similar to the previous two, and utilized small groupings of similar plants, including a grove of pines and spruces at the edge of the park on the northwest; poplar, birches, and lindens along the lakeshore; goldenrods and asters; larches at path intersections; grove of elms; and “oaks in variety.” A broad carriageway circled the park, and walking paths followed the carriageways and lake edge.²⁹ In April 1906, Simonds gave a speech entitled, “Landscape Gardening - Illustrated” at the banquet of the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association.³⁰



Figure 4.4. O.C. Simonds’ plan for Vilas Park, 1906
(City of Madison Parks Division)

By October 1906, another plan was created that showed development of the park, designed by Mr. Emil T. Mische, landscape designer and park superintendent. This plan represented the “as built” condition at that time.³¹ This plan followed Simonds’ design in form, retaining the large and small islands and lagoon, and circular carriageway around the park. The playground, picnic area, and wading pool were removed in this

28 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1906.

29 O.C. Simonds Landscape Gardeners, Plan of Henry Vilas Park, Madison Wisconsin, March 29, 1906.

30 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1906.

31 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1907.

plan, in favor of a large meadow “Wingra Meadow.” A formal, straight entrance into the park was designed to be at the corner of Drake and Warren Streets. The planting design seems simplified in this plan as well – it is unknown if the more detailed design of Simonds was followed during construction or not.³² Two stone and concrete bridges over the lagoon, costing \$5,000, were donated by Mr. Vilas in 1906.

By the end of 1906, 40.8 acres of former bog had been filled to create the park, while 23.2 acres were on the “high ground” making the total area of the park 64 acres.³³ Construction of the carriage road adjacent to the Vilas Park Mound Group damaged some of the mounds.³⁴

1907 – The Annual Report of the Park and Pleasure Drive Association describes that the planned construction of the bridges in 1906 was postponed and funds were to be used, instead, to prepare the ‘high ground’ and filled area for seeding and planting (approximately 44 acres in total). Senator Vilas heartily approved the proposed change.³⁵



Figure 4.5. View of Henry Vilas Park, 1908
(Wisconsin Historical Society, 3088)

1908 – The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association hired landscape architect and city planner John Nolen to create a plan for laying out Madison city parks. His design created a comprehensive approach that

32 General Plan, Henry Vilas Park, Madison Wisconsin, Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association, October 1906.

33 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1906. 40

34 *Vilas Park Mound Group*, National Register of Historic Places Registration, 1991.

35 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1907.

linked Vilas Park with others throughout the city.³⁶

1911 – Anna M. Vilas gives \$25,000 to the city on condition that it would purchase additional land for Henry Vilas Park, fill the low portion of the park, build a drive on the island and build bridges across the lagoon.³⁷

The Henry Vilas Zoo officially opened. Created out of 28 acres from the park, animal exhibits included nine deer, three woodchucks, and an American eagle, amongst others.³⁸ The exhibits were linked with gravel paths lined with shrubs formed sinuous pathways.

1912 – The 1912 Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association Report includes, “under the conditions of the gift the Association is required, on or before November 1, 1912, to cause the lands acquired to be improved as a part of and as an addition to the Henry Vilas Park in accordance with the lands and designs furnished by some competent landscape architect approved by the directors of the Association.”³⁹

1913 – The Park and Pleasure Drive Association secures options on two properties acquiring all of the land in the condition of the 1911 Anna M. Vilas gift; fill operations using 30,000 yards of material and commence in the low areas of the main park and the extension area.

1915 – The Vilas Park Mound Group was marked with a plaque in 1915 by the Wisconsin Archeological Society in a ceremony attended by representatives of twelve American Indian tribes.⁴⁰

1917 – Park and Pleasure Drive Association invites suggestion and models for the Annie C. Stewart fountain design; its location is considered desirable for its sightlines and ability to conduct water to the zoo.⁴¹

1924 – An aerial photograph shows Vilas Park with an open meadow, circular carriageway, and formal entrance at the corner of Drake Street and Randall Avenue (Figure 4.6). The zoo is visible in the foreground. Portions of the park closest to the lake edge appear to have several dying trees. The large meadow is framed by groupings of mature shade trees.

1925 – The Annie Stewart Fountain was completed as a pedestrian entrance feature for Vilas Park and the Henry Vilas Zoo. Dedicated to Annie C. Stewart (1867 to 1905) who engaged in charitable activities in Madison, her mother bequeathed a gift of \$2,000 to the Madison Park & Pleasure Drive Association

36 City of Madison Landmarks Commission, Tenney Park Landmark Nomination, City of Madison, 1994.

37 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1907.

38 Henry Vilas Zoo History, accessed online 8/7/2019: <https://vilaszoo.org/about-us/history>.

39 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1912.

40 Vilas Park Mound Group, National Register of Historic Places Registration, 1991.

41 Madison Park and Pleasure Ground Annual Report, 1917-1918.



Figure 4.6. View of Henry Vilas Park, 1924
(Wisconsin Historical Society, 31273)

to commission a drinking fountain in memory of her only child.⁴² The gift was to be used to construct a drinking fountain and in the will it stipulated that Annie’s name was to be visibly inscribed on the fountain and that it be erected at an appropriate place in Madison. The fountain was designed by Frederick J. Clasgens, Cincinnati, Ohio, with figures in marble following a nautical theme, including a mermaid, dolphin, two Tritons, and a cornucopia.⁴³ The Tritons were set on the edge of the basin, and emptied water from their conch shells into smaller basins containing drinking fountains. A paved path circled the fountain. The fountain faced Erin St. and was an entrance feature at the southeast end of Vilas Park (Figure 4.7).

1929 – The zoo’s first primate house was built. (Henry Vilas Zoo History, accessed online 8/7/2019: <https://vilaszoo.org/about-us/history>)

1931 – The John L. Bourke drinking fountain was constructed at the edge of the Vilas Park playground.

⁴² Wisconsin State Journal Vol. 107 No. 14 | April 17, 1906 | “New Gifts for Madison’s Beauty”

⁴³ Annie Stewart Fountain Conservation/Preservation Plan. Prepared by InSite Consulting Architects, prepared for Parks Division, City of Madison, 2017.



Figure 4.7. *The Annie Stewart Fountain, 1926*
(Wisconsin Historical Society, 51976)

The hexagonal-shaped fountain was constructed of cobblestones set on a concrete base. The fountain was designed by Fred Winkelmann, Director of the Henry Vilas Zoo. Bourke was secretary of the Park and Pleasure Drive Association.⁴⁴

1931 – In the summer of 1931, two boys seriously damaged the Annie Stewart Fountain, breaking off one of the triton’s arms with a hammer.⁴⁵ The two tritons are no longer part of the fountain.

1936 –A wooden footbridge (Figure 4.8) was constructed that connected the mainland with the small island in the lagoon. Constructed of 6x6 wood posts, the bridge spanned 94-feet across the lagoon with abutments of rubble stone.⁴⁶

1937-1938 - The City of Madison assumes ownership of the zoo, Vilas Park, and other parks from the Madison Park & Pleasure Drive Association (Figure 4.9). (Henry Vilas Zoo History, accessed online 8/7/2019: <https://vilaszoo.org/about-us/history>)

44 Historic Image, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS 19018

45 Wisconsin State Journal Vol. 138 No. 84 | June 24, 1931 | “Claim Boys Smashed Vilas Park Fountain”

46 Plan, West Foot Bridge for Henry Vilas Park, Madison, Wisconsin. Madison Board of Park Commissioners, September 22, 1936.

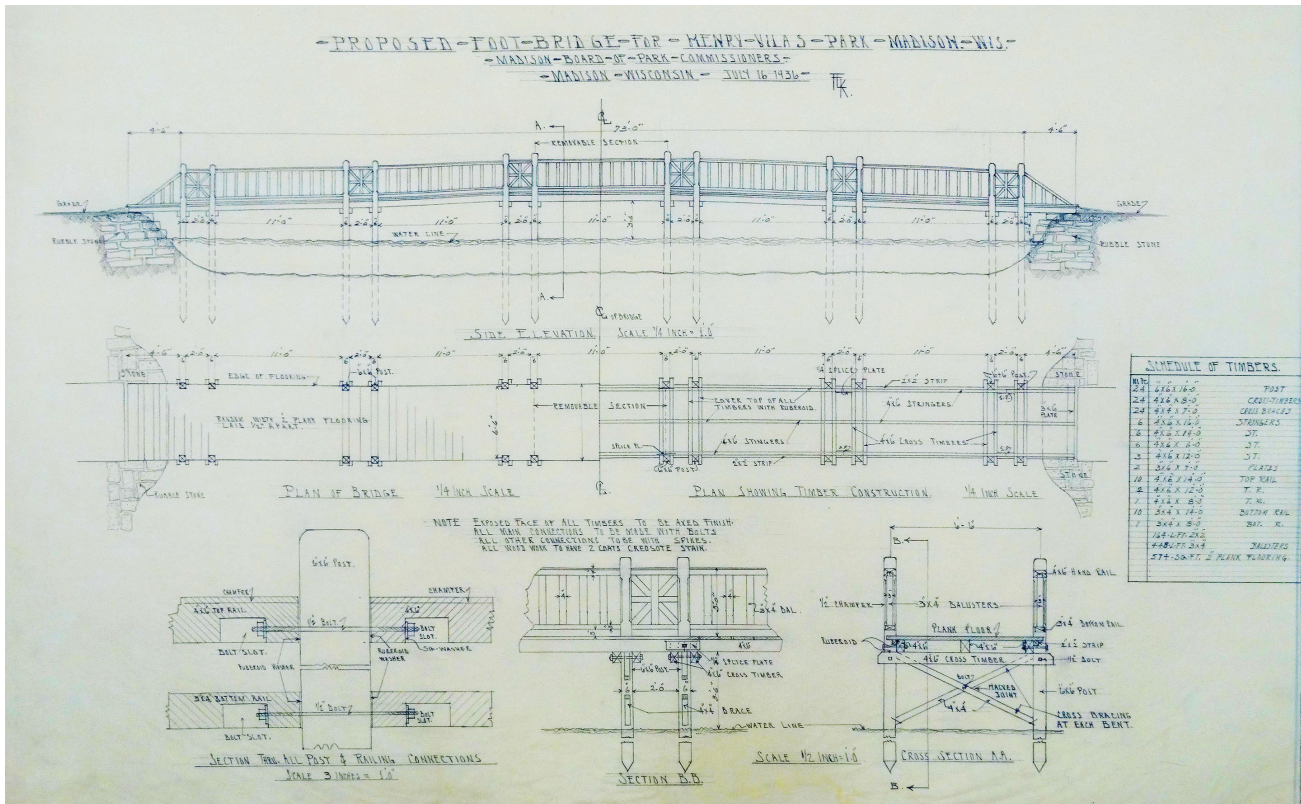


Figure 4.8. Proposed Foot Bridge, 1936
(Wisconsin Historical Society, W46)



Figure 4.9. Aerial photograph of Henry Vilas Park, 1937
Visible are six tennis courts, four baseball fields, and a hockey rink. A broad beach is on the edge of Lake Wingra, and nearby parking area along the road.
(University of Wisconsin Historical Society)

1939 – Plans were drawn for an “Island Theater” to be located on the small island in the lagoon. Plans included a stage flanked by twin restrooms/dressing rooms and lawn seating and bleachers for the audience.⁴⁷ The Island Theater was never actually constructed.

1950, May – More than 150 Madison high school pupils recruited through the Madison Youth Council helped plant trees and shrubs on the Vilas Park island.⁴⁸

1951 ca. – The Vilas Park Shelter was added.⁴⁹

1955 – A plan was drafted with proposed revisions to the park, by A.L. Johnson.⁵⁰ The plan illustrates expanded parking north of the zoo, tennis courts, hockey rinks, a shelter, and the summer theater on the island of the lagoon, bath house adjacent to the beach and wide parking area, and an overlook adjacent to the mounds (Figure 4.10). Portions of this plan were implemented in the mid-1906s, when the lagoon would be modified to a smaller size and the lakeshore modified, in order to accommodate an expansion of the zoo, and increased parking area.

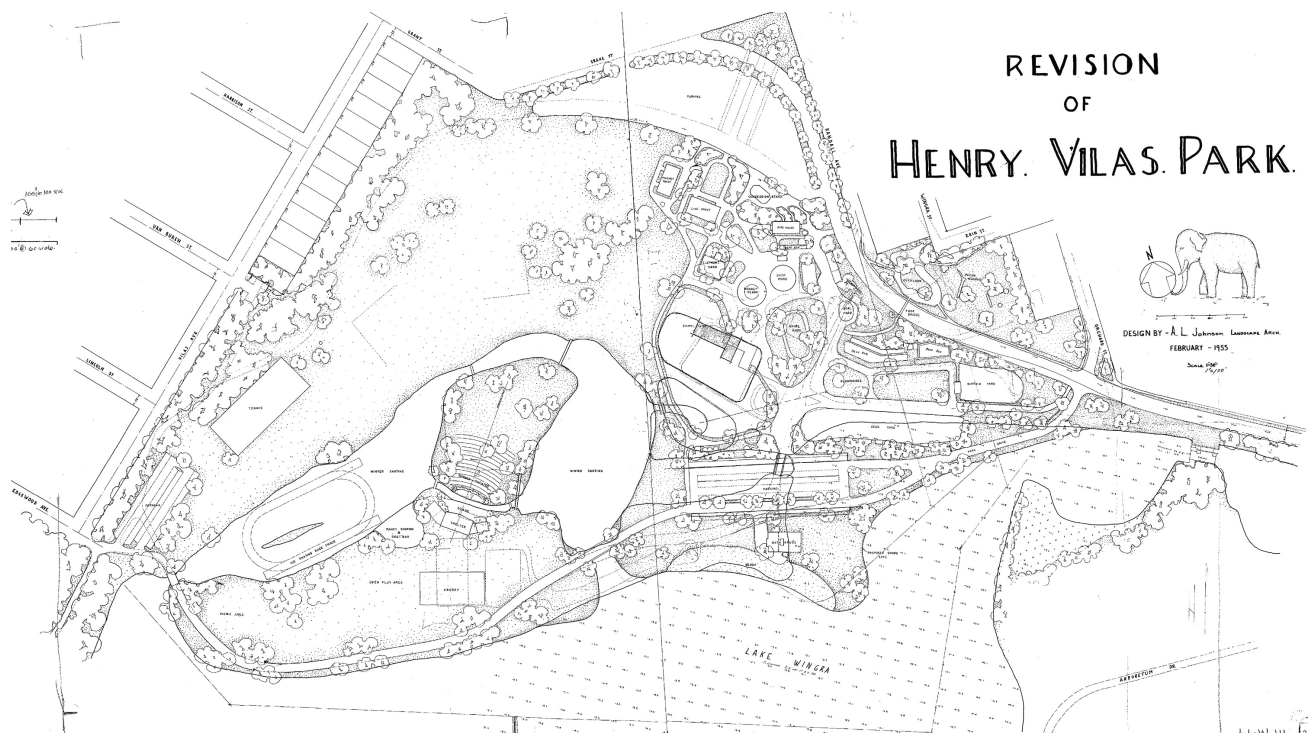


Figure 4.10. Master Plan for Vilas Park, 1955
(City of Madison Parks Division)

47 Preliminary Plan for An Island Theater, Henry Vilas Park, Board of Park Commissioners, November 1939.

48 Historic Image, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS 65355

49 Historic Image, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS 73474

50 Revision of Henry Vilas Park, Design by A.L. Johnson, Landscape Architect, February 1955.



Figure 4.11. “Old Woman in a Shoe”, 2019
(MSA)

1962 - The “Old Woman in a Shoe” slide was built in 1962 as a gift to the Madison community (Figure 4.11). Members of the Madison Lathers Local 111, Madison Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons Local 204 donated the labor and materials. Warren Walder oversaw construction of the slide, which was dedicated to George Morrell, a lather/contractor who had died several years earlier.⁵¹

1964 - A master plan was developed for the zoo that proposed expansion of the exhibits to the south and east.⁵²

1964 – A visitor map to the Henry Vilas Park Zoo indicates features within the park included a canoe house on the island in the lagoon, and a band stand located in the meadow on the mainland.

1975 – The City of Madison Parks Planning developed a master plan for Vilas Park. A proposed parking area accommodating 147 vehicles was located west of the tennis courts, and a children’s zoo was added on a new island in the lagoon. Bike lanes were to be added to the road along the lakeshore.

51 George Hesselberg, Wisconsin State Journal, “Vilas Park Slide was Gift and Work Of Tradesmen” July 13, 2014.

52 Hugh A Dega Associates, Master Plan Henry Vilas Zoo Prepared under the direction of the Joint Master Plan Committee of the Madison Board of Commissioners and the Henry Vilas Park Zoological Society, 1964.

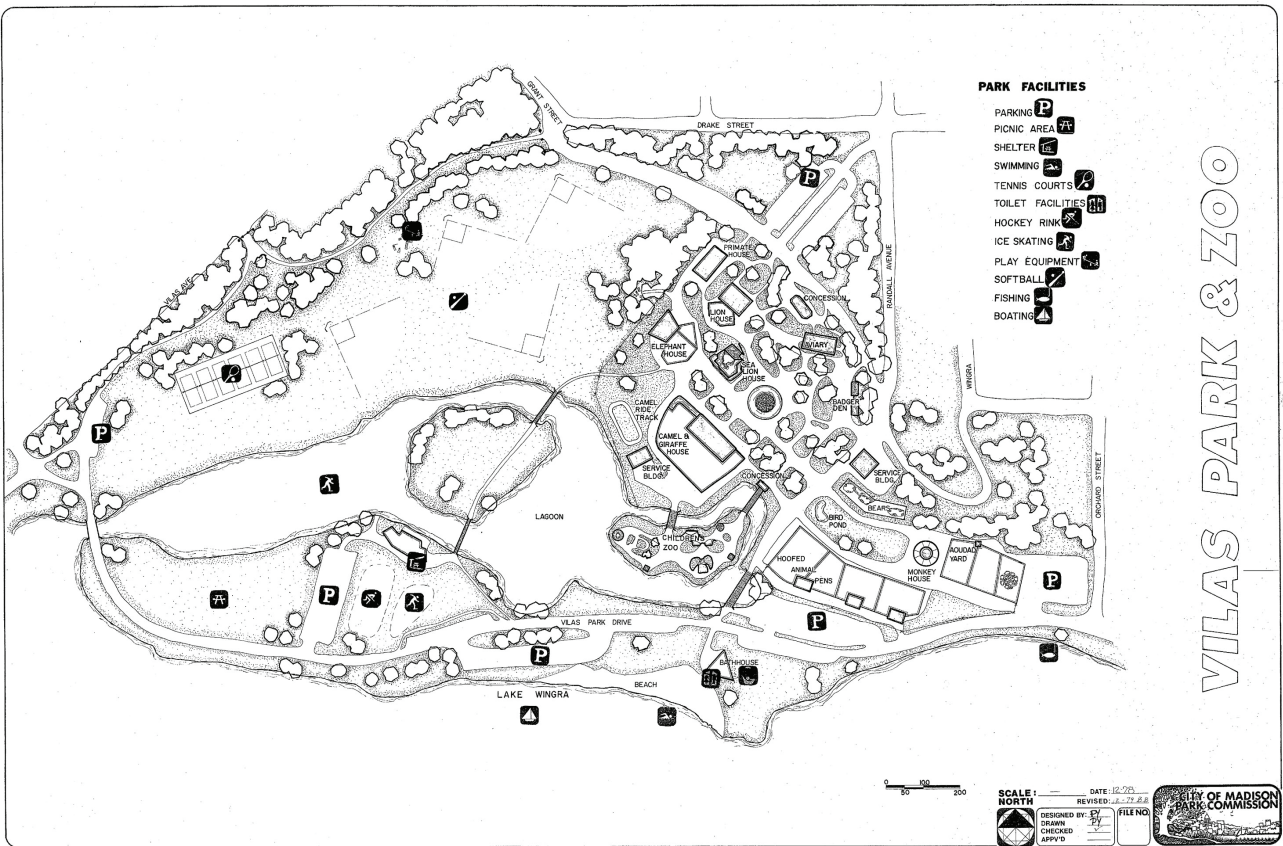


Figure 4.12. Plan of Vilas Park, 1979
(City of Madison Parks Division)

1983 - Ownership of the zoo is transferred from the City of Madison to Dane County, a process that takes a decade to complete.⁵³

1991 – Vilas Park Indian Mounds was designated a City of Madison landmark on May 7, 1990.⁵⁴

2010 – Sidewalks were added and some were replaced, adjacent the Vilas Park Mound Group.⁵⁵

2013 – Vilas Park Drive was modified by angled parking added to the edges.⁵⁶

2015 – The Arctic Passage was completed at the zoo, the largest renovation in the zoo’s history. The new exhibit complex modified the direction of visitor access into the zoo, and gated off the former entrance area.

53 Henry Vilas Zoo History, accessed online 8/7/2019: <https://vilaszoo.org/about-us/history>

54 Vilas Park Mound Group, National Register of Historic Places Registration, 1991.

55 Compilation Topographic Survey of Vilas Park Mounds Area Plan, 2010.

56 City of Madison, Vilas Park Drive Preliminary Design Drawing, 2013-03-08.

History Diagram Map 4.1

Intentionally Left Blank

Simond Plan Diagram Map 4.2



Intentionally Left Blank

MADISON PARK AND PLEASURE DRIVE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT PHOTOS
See Map 4.2 for location of photos



① Elm Court - 1908



② Wingra Meadow - 1910



③ Burr Oak Drive - 1913



④ Wingra Meadow - A Sane Fourth - 1911



④ Wingra Meadow - 1910



⑤ Lagoon Dredging - 1906



⑥ Waiting for the Tableaux - 1912



⑦ Boat Landing - 1907



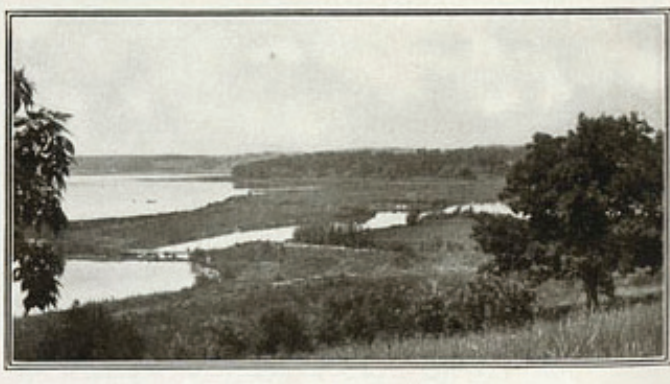
⑧ Wild Rice Island - 1919



⑨ Vilas Park from Edgewood - 1910



⑩ Lagoon - 1911



11 Vilas Park from Additions (Mounds) - 1909



12 Vilas Park from Fountain Hill - 1919



13 Vilas Lagoon (Bog) - 1907



14 Vilas Park and Lake Wingra from Addition (Mounds) = 1913



15 Erin Street Entrance - 1921



16 Mounds on Fountain Hill - 1919



17 Auto Parking Place (Overlook) - 1916



18 Wingra Street walk to Mounds - 1921



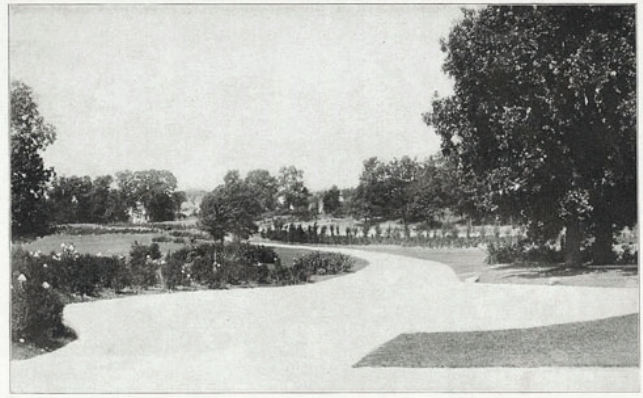
19 Plant Bed - 1913



20 Pagoda and New Walk, Small Island - 1919



21 Small Island - 1919



22 Burr Oak Drive at Elm Court - 1908



Henry Vilas Park - 1917

Page Intentionally Left Blank