

Des Plaines River Trail



Big Bend Lake

When the Illinois Tollway system was established in the mid 1950's, the need for fill to build the roadways resulted in the creation of dozens of artificial lakes from DuPage County to the Wisconsin state line. Big Bend Lake is a result of that construction. Today, Big Bend Lake and the surrounding area are home to waterfowl and other birds and wildlife. Fishing, canoeing and kayaking are popular visitor activities.



(Area to be cut)

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Forming Habitats

Then and Now

The historic aerial photograph above illustrates land usage of the Big Bend Lake area before it was excavated for fill.

The aerial to the right depicts current usage, and illustrates Big Bend Lake in its present day state.



Meteor Crater in Barringer, Arizona less than one mile in diameter.

Source: Wikimedia Commons by D. Ruddy, U.S. Geological Survey

Des Plaines Disturbance

Des Plaines is at the center of a suspected meteorite strike estimated to have occurred approximately 280 million years ago. The actual epicenter is believed to be around the modern-day intersection of Dempster Street and the I-294 Tollway, directly south of where you are standing. There are no visible signs on the surface because the crater has since been filled with glacial till. However, beneath 75 to 200 feet of glacial till lies a massive five-mile diameter crater evidenced by fractured and deformed rock. For comparison purposes, the famous "Meteor Crater" in Arizona is less than one mile in diameter.

Sources: IL State Geological Survey and Geology Underfoot in Illinois by Raymond Wiggers

Did You Know?

The Forest Preserve around Big Bend Lake has been identified as potential habitat for the state threatened Kirtland's Snake. This small (14-18"), reclusive snake eats earthworms and slugs and spends the winter hibernating underground, often using abandoned crayfish burrows.



Photo by Michael Redmer





Des Plaines River Trail

(Area to be cut)

September	1836
Sat. 3	Finished cutting oats near the river
Sun. 4	Attended meeting at Mr. Long's Lamb preached
Mon. 5	Bound and drew oats weather cool and windy
Tues. 6	Morning frosty day warm drew oats Meacham and family staid the afternoon at father's
Wed. 7	Drew oats, peas etc
Thurs. 8	Threshed peas built brush fence on the bank of the river
Frid. 9	Made fence made a bed for threshing
Sat. 10	Rode out in the afternoon called at Bennicetts Fogers and Peets Went with L. Clifford to hunt cattle broke stone pot
Sun. 11	(Mr. Kent preached at my house
Mon. 12	Commenced ploughing for fall wheat
Tues. 13	Ploughed
Wed. 14	Ploughed, let Mr. Kent have some potatoes
Thurs. 15	Worked at finishing my house L. Hart
Frid. 16	Worked at my house
Sat. 17	Hunted up calves, built cow yard Harvested early corn etc
Sun. 18	Started for meeting but found out that there was no preaching at the expected time. Long called
Mon. 19	Made churn hunted for horses
Tues. 20	Made churn hunted for horses killed a badger etc
Wed. 21	Worked at my house J. Long
Thurs. 23	Helped hew timber for corn house F. Soules turned 12 cows into pasture
Fri. 24	Hewed timber evening went to see Mr. Dougherty sick of a fever called at Long's and got 2 lbs. of tea cr. to him 1.50
Sun. 25	Mr. Kent preached at my house day cool morning a little frosty
Mon. 26	Opened oat stacks pulled beans etc
Tues. 27	Killed a prairie wolf drew wood, pumpkins oats etc
Wed. 28	(Drew oats heard big wolves howl)
Thurs. 29	Pulled beans first frost sufficient to kill vines
Fri. 30	Finished drawing oats out corn for hogs
Oct. 1 Sat.	Finished pulling beans afternoon a thunder shower
Sun. 2	Took a walk in the grove
Mon. 3	Went to Chicago carried pumpkins and peas Bought flour at \$9.00 and lime \$2.00 Receipts \$8.23 Expense \$30.76 Soules took away his cows. \$22.47

Entries from of a page of the Conant Diary, 1836.



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Building A Future

Des Plaines Greenhouse Workers.
Source: Paul Warren Stoddard - Works Progress Administration, circa 1934.

Garland Homestead

Solomon Garland settled in Des Plaines in 1861 at the age of 32. He established a homestead which stretched from the Des Plaines River east to Potter Road and from Ballard Road south to the Union Pacific – Northwest Line railroad tracks. Used primarily for farming, the property had six greenhouses. Three of Solomon's sons: Frank, Warren and Solomon Jr., each owned a greenhouse while son Frank had a foundry which produced greenhouses. Solomon's wife, Minnie, operated one of the first floral shops in Des Plaines.



Image by Paul Warren Stoddard

The Greenhouse Industry in Des Plaines

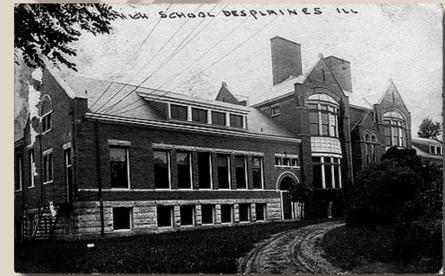
At one time, Des Plaines had so many greenhouses that Lord and Burnham built a foundry here circa 1910 to provide parts for the large glass and steel structures that dotted the city's landscape. In 1951, a local newspaper noted that "More roses and carnations are grown in Des Plaines than anywhere else in the universe . . ." but by the 1960s, with the growth of O'Hare Airport, the once thriving industry was in decline. It was less expensive to ship flowers that were grown in warmer climates than it was to grow them in the forced atmosphere of the greenhouses.

Plant Search?

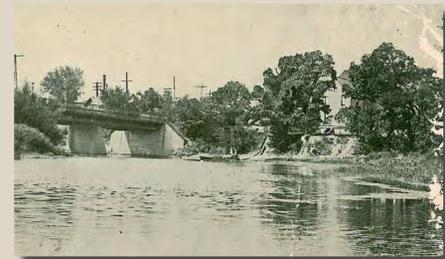
Sugar Maples are now common in Des Plaines River forests. The color of their fall foliage is considered by many to be unrivalled with leaf colors including yellows, oranges, and reds. Sugar maple trees are also the principal source of maple sugar used to make maple syrup.



Des Plaines River Trail



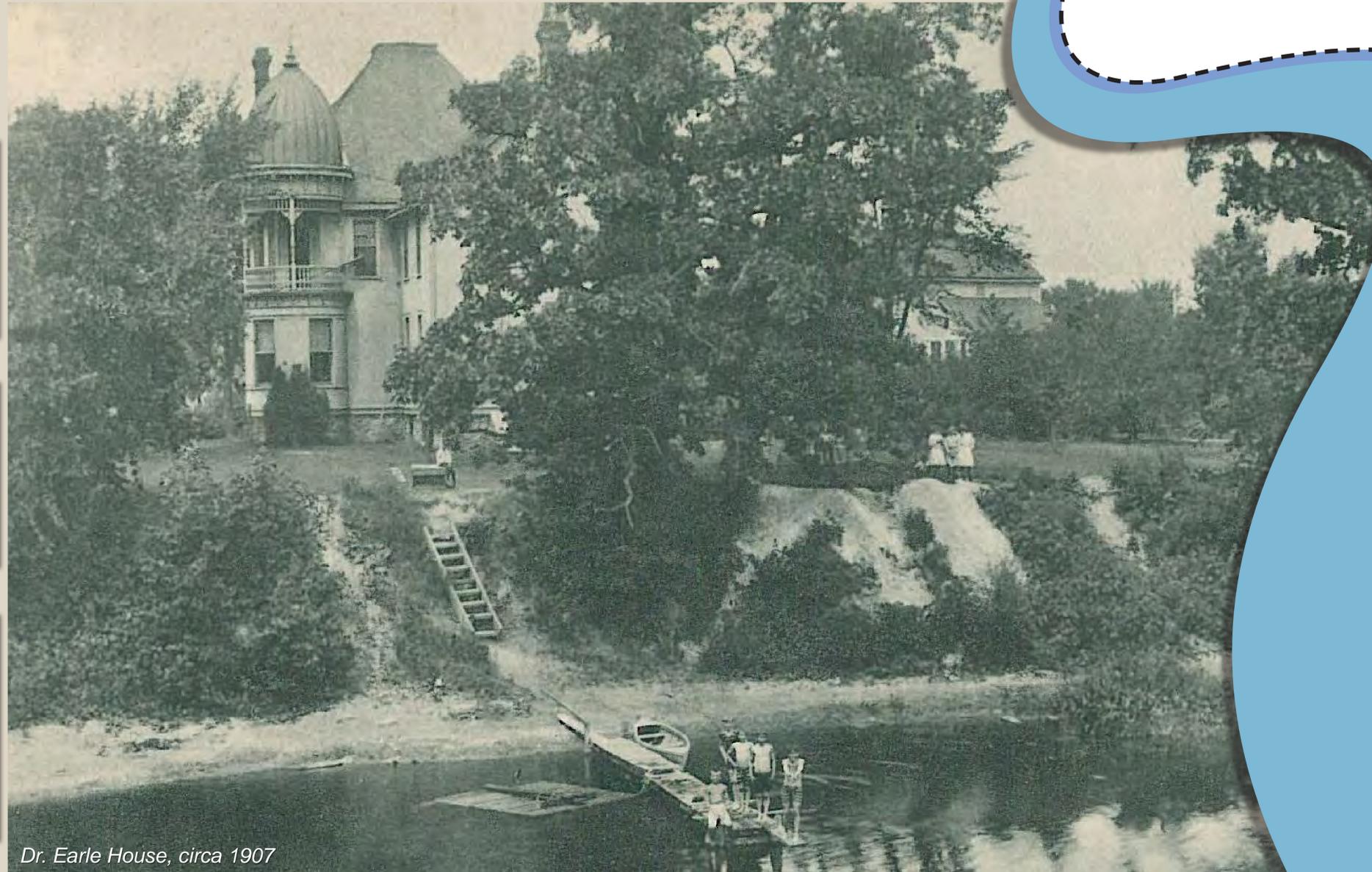
Maine Township High School, circa 1920's



Miner Street Bridge, circa 1910



Des Plaines River, circa 1937



Dr. Earle House, circa 1907

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A Growing Community

Dr. Earle House and Rand Mill

The Illinois and Wisconsin Land Company built a steam mill just west of here circa 1852 to saw railroad ties. Early settler, Socrates Rand, graded a four mile stretch of land, and the Company provided the ties. A station was built, named after the Des Plaines River, and daily commuter traffic between here and Chicago began in 1854.

The mill was purchased by Rand who continued to saw ties for a time and later converted it to a grist mill which served the local farming community. Rand died in 1890, and the property was purchased by Dr. Clarence A. Earle. Earle moved the mill a short distance north and built a copper domed house that sat majestically at river's edge.



Socrates Rand 1804-1890

Socrates Rand arrived in Des Plaines from Vermont in 1835, and settled on land near the intersection of River and Rand Roads which he farmed for many years. Long referred to as "The Father of Des Plaines", Rand served as the Postmaster, Justice of the Peace -- he officiated at the area's first marriage in 1836 -- and helped establish Maine Township in 1850. The area was named the Town of Rand in his honor. In 1869, the Town won a petition to incorporate as the Town of Des Plaines, reincorporating as a Village four years later.



Dr. Clarence A. Earle 1862-1938

In the early 20th century, Dr. Earle was instrumental in shaping the face of the growing community. Local children attended high school in the Jefferson Park area of Chicago, and Earle was a moving force in the establishment of Maine Township High School. The first campus opened in 1901 near Thacker and Prairie Streets. He persuaded Andrew Carnegie to donate \$5,000 for Des Plaines' first Public Library which opened in 1907. Earle also helped create the Des Plaines Park District and was a well known local doctor.

Earle had a great love of history, and was Des Plaines' first real historian, writing many articles for the Des Plaines Historical Society's Quarterly Journals. Once he learned of a diary written by Augustus Conant about life in Des Plaines from 1836 to 1842, Earle dedicated himself to finding this document. Earle located it in Rockford, Illinois and donated it to the Chicago Historical Society where it is still used by researchers.

Did You Know?

Local weather conditions affect animal and plant populations in numerous ways. For example, spring flowers typically bloom along the Des Plaines River two weeks earlier than at cooler sites near Lake Michigan.

Source: Natural History of the Chicago Region by Joel Greenberg, UC Press (2002)





Des Plaines River Trail

Downtown Des Plaines - City of Destiny

A Brief History of Des Plaines...

1833 – Treaty of Chicago signed. Arrival of the first settlers from New England and New York began farming the prairie that would eventually become Des Plaines.

1840's and 1850's – German immigrants, seeking economic and political freedom, arrived in the area in large numbers. German was the primary language in many Des Plaines homes and churches.

1850's – The present site of Des Plaines was determined by the Illinois and Wisconsin Land Company, a group of land speculators engaged in building a railroad from Chicago to Janesville, Wisconsin.

1852 – A steam powered mill was constructed next to the Des Plaines River to cut railroad ties from the forested belt of burr oak and hickory along the river. The mill was later purchased by Socrates Rand, one of the area's first settlers, and converted to a grist mill. The area of the existing downtown began to grow around the railroad and the mill.

1869 – Des Plaines was first incorporated and the federal census of the following year shows that the town had grown to a population of 800.

1873 – Village form of government adopted.

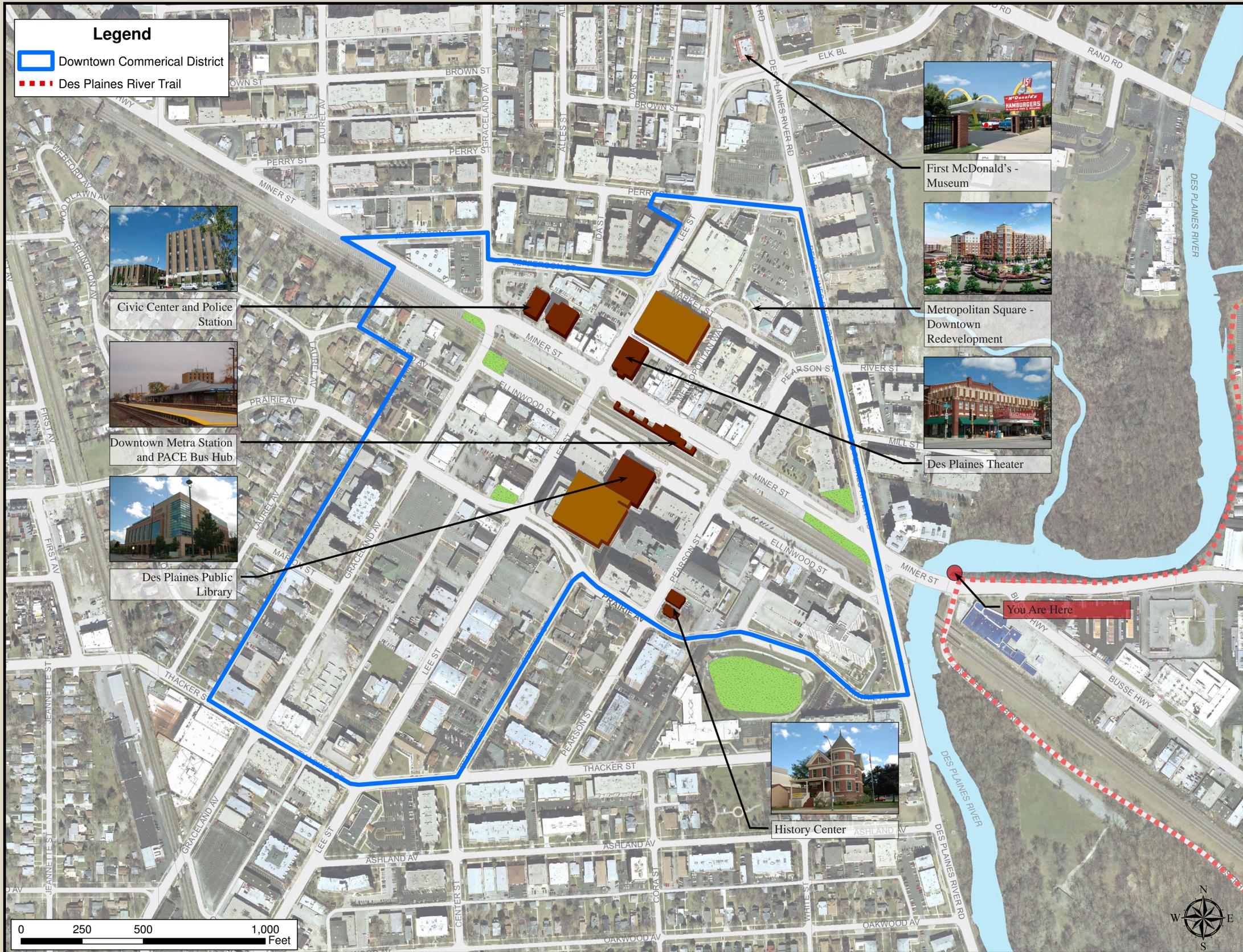
1925 – Present city form of government was established with H.T. Bennet as the first mayor.

Post WWII – Movement of people from the City of Chicago, plus the development of O'Hare International Airport signaled a great period of growth for Des Plaines. Population jumped from pre-war nine thousand to over fifty thousand.

1950's – Construction of the I-294 and I-90 tollways.

1990 to Present – The city experienced phenomenal industrial growth, becoming a raw materials and finished products distribution center, as well as the headquarters of several major corporations.

Today the City of Des Plaines is a progressive city characterized by fine residences, industrial opportunities and an abundance of business and trade facilities. There are over thirty churches representing every major denomination. The city's elementary and secondary schools are nationally acclaimed. A progressive park district accommodates the recreational needs of all ages. And the art and theater guilds, the community concert series, a fine public library and a history center are true indications of the cultural growth of the community.



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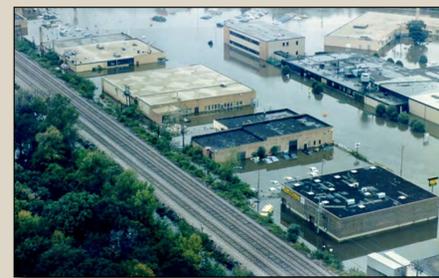
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Des Plaines River Trail

Flood History

The Des Plaines River has a long history of flooding. The Flood of Record occurred in October of 1986 with the Des Plaines River peaking at Flood Stage 10.88 near the City of Des Plaines. That single flood affected 33 municipalities up and down the river, causing an estimated \$35 million in damages to dwellings and businesses, and resulting in the evacuation of more than 15,000 residents.

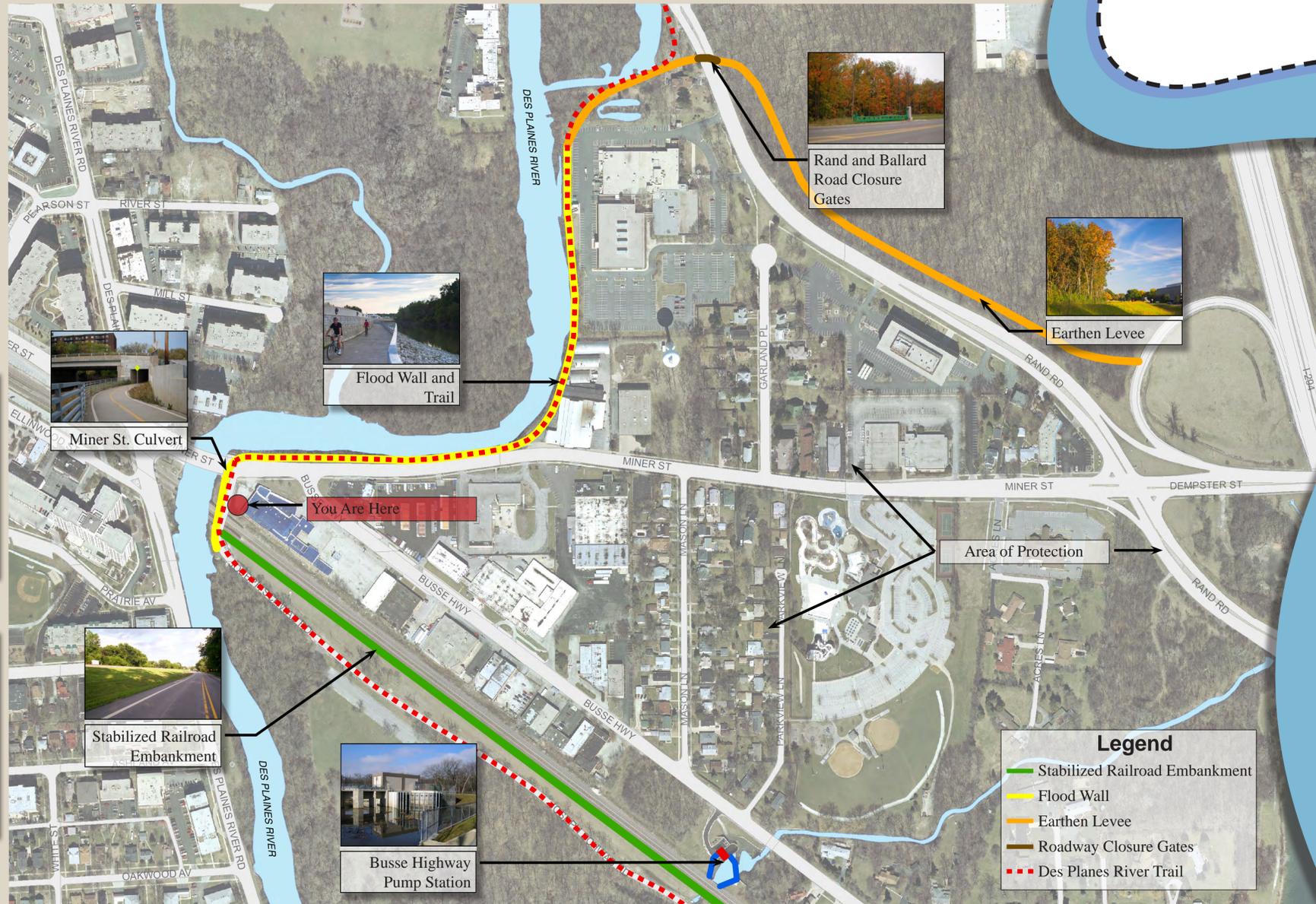
The photos below were taken during the 1986 Flood of Record. These areas are now protected from Des Plaines River flooding by the Levee 50 project.



Looking North toward Busse Highway and Miner Street businesses



Looking Northeast Toward I-294/Dempster Interchange (St. Johns Church and Holy Family Health Care)



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Rand Park Flood Control Project (Levee 50)

What is the Levee 50 Project?

The Levee 50 project emerged from a decade-long study of the Des Plaines River watershed by the Army Corps of Engineers and partners. The purpose of the study was to identify projects that could reduce the impacts from the periodic flooding along the river. Only projects that had a positive benefit-cost ratio and that would not result in an increase of the upstream or downstream river levels could be advanced. In the end, six flood control projects emerged from the study. The Levee 50 project, completed in 2010, was the first of these six projects to be constructed.

Prior to the construction of the Levee 50 project, flooding from the Des Plaines River caused \$1,315,500 in average annual flood damages to 181 structures east of the River. The project was designed to protect these properties from flooding by the River. The graphic above identifies the main components of the Levee 50 Project. Other projects are in the works that will further address the flooding issues on both the east and west sides of the River including reservoir, roadway and sewer projects.

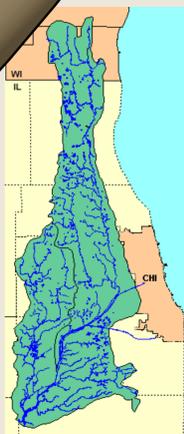
Multi-Use Trail Component of the Levee 50 Project

The multi-use trail component of the Levee 50 Project was installed as part of a federally-funded Grand Illinois Trail project. This 12-foot wide concrete trail segment, combined with the Miner Street culvert, closed a crucial gap in the roughly 50-mile Des Plaines River Trail.

Regular trail users will notice that the trail and the culvert are subject to flooding. This is because the culvert (tunnel) to your left was first and foremost designed as part of the flood control project to provide necessary "hydraulic conveyance" during flood events. In addition, the elevation of the trail was severely constrained due to the existing elevation of the Miner Street bridge and the utilities running under the bridge. The use of the culvert as a trail during dry times was therefore an added bonus.

Trail users can access up to the hour information about the river levels from the National Weather Service Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service page (www.weather.gov, click the "Water" tab above the map, then use the map to zoom in on the "Des Plaines River at Des Plaines" gauge). The trail at the tunnel will begin flooding at approximately Flood Stage 1.8. Under these conditions, trail users will have to use on-street detours.

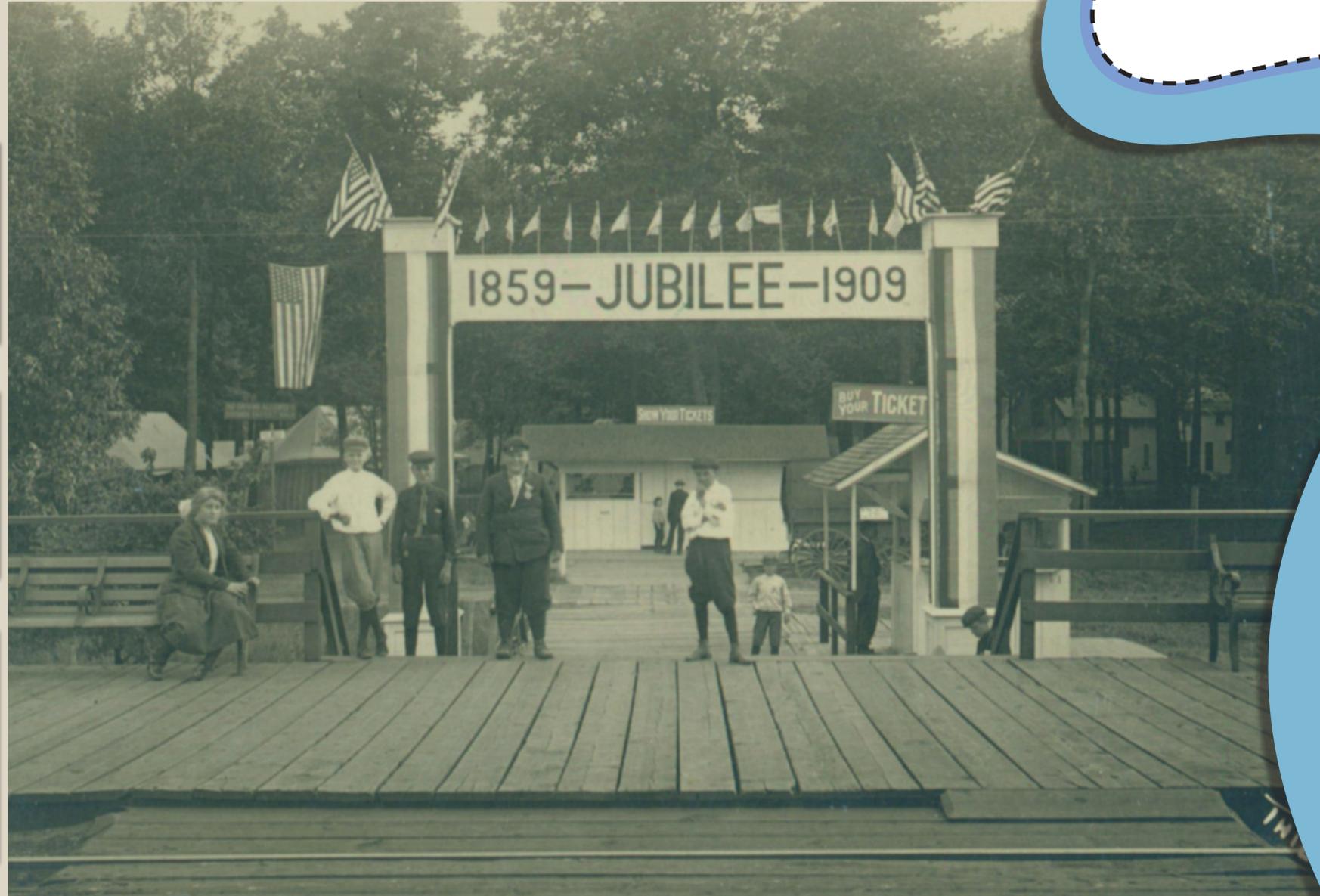
Did You Know?
The Des Plaines River watershed begins in Racine and Kenosha counties in southeastern Wisconsin and drains ~480 square miles. Rain that falls in Wisconsin typically takes 2-3 days to make the journey south to the City of Des Plaines.



Source:
www.desplainswatershed.org



Des Plaines River Trail



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View of Campground from Thompson Avenue, ca 1910



Des Plaines Campground Auditorium, ca 1910



Des Plaines Campground Cottages, ca 1910

Historical Attractions

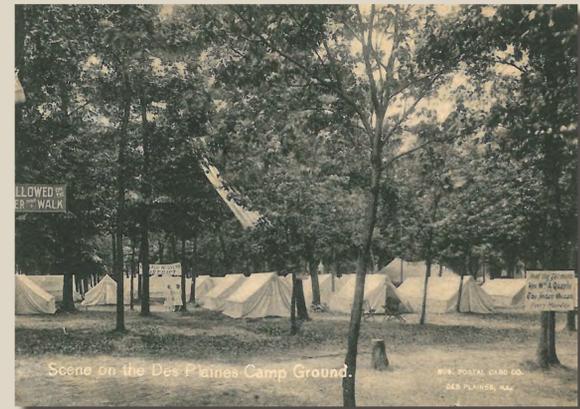
Methodist Campground

The first camp meeting was held in 1860 on property owned by Socrates Rand just north of here. The camp moved to the current location a few years later. A circle of tents served as housing and enclosed a large clearing in which religious services met. Within a few years, small cottages joined the tents in the circular "wheel pattern" arrangement borrowed from the Martha's Vineyard Campmeeting Association.

Methodist Campground 50th Anniversary. Source: Des Plaines Photographer William J. Thiede, 1909.

Camp Slemmer

By General Order No. 33 of the War Department, Camp Slemmer was established along the banks of the Des Plaines River in July 1861 to train regulars for the United States Infantry in the Civil War. Under the command of Major Sidney Coolidge, approximately 350 men known as the Sixteenth Regiment U.S. Infantry broke camp and left for Columbus, Ohio and further instruction in early November.



Suburban Post Card Co., 1907.

Waldorf Tabernacle

Built in 1903, the American Tabernacle replaced a large canvas tent that had been in use for many years. Constructed with wood from trees along the Des Plaines River, it is supported by a lightweight steel frame similar to that used in construction of the Eiffel Tower. The building received its current name "Waldorf Tabernacle" in 1943 following the death of State Bishop Ernest Lyn Waldorf, a supporter of the campground.

Plant Search!

Did you know that trees such as the white oak may outlive most humans. In fact some white oaks can live to be over 500 years old. Some of the trees in this area may have been here when Major Coolidge's men broke camp at this site in 1861.



Des Plaines River Trail



Iroquois School Dig

During an ecology field trip through the nearby forests, local educators and students from the Iroquois Community School's "Gifted in Science" program found a depression in the ground with pieces of glass, iron and earthenware lying about. This discovery turned into an archaeological dig of the former Nelson and Kranz farm site, in what is now Iroquois Woods, near Touhy Avenue and the Des Plaines River.

The dig began in May 1985 under the supervision of Forest Preserve personnel. Following archaeological procedures they set up grids and, for the next few summers, students continued the dig where they unearthed, researched, and documented hundreds of artifacts dating back from the late 1800's to 1920's.



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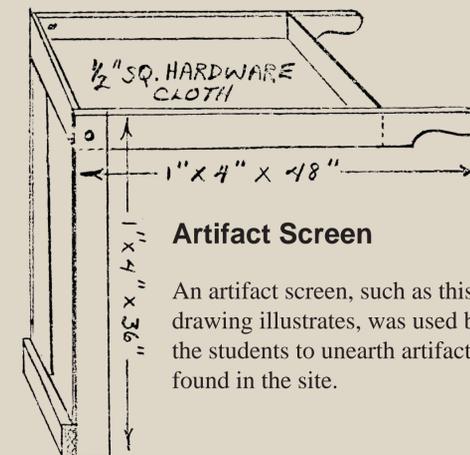
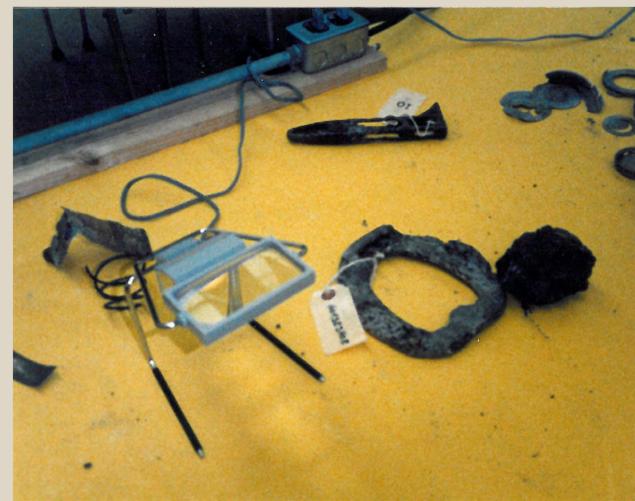
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Discovering the Past

Finds at the Dig

While many common household items were found including knives, forks, spoons, bottles and remnants of jugs and crocks, perhaps one of the most interesting artifacts unearthed was a lady's compact engraved with the name "Harriet Hubbard Ayer." Ayer (1849 – 1903) was a Chicago socialite who established her own company selling facial cream when her husband's business ventures failed.

The items discovered in the dig are now housed in the state museum in Springfield, Illinois. For more information about the dig, please contact the Des Plaines History Center.



Plant Search?

Shagbark Hickory trees, once common in these forests, can be easily identified by the "shaggy" peeling bark. The hard wood of hickory trees was valued for many uses such as baseball bats, including Babe Ruth's famous 47-ounce bats. Today bats are typically made from White Ash or Maple due to their lighter weight.

