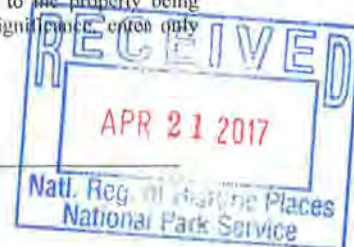


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MP-1026

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: In the northwestern quadrant of Olcott Park, 9<sup>th</sup> St N. and 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. N.

City or town: Virginia State: MN County: St. Louis

Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A  B  C  D

 4/20/17

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Signature of certifying official/Title: Amy Spong, Deputy SHPO, MNHS Date

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State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

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Signature of commenting official: Date

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Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government


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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

for   
Signature of the Keeper

  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
<u>1</u>	_____	structures
<u>2</u>	_____	objects
<u>3</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register None

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

LANDSCAPE/garden

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

LANDSCAPE/garden

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER/National Park Service Rustic Style

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

**Summary Paragraph**

With federal assistance, the City of Virginia built a fountain and pool, a rock garden, and an observation deck in the northwest quadrant of Olcott Park in 1937. At the center of the rectangular pool is an octagonal granite edifice which houses a General Electric Novalux Seven Projector Electric Fountain capable of shining multiple variations of color lights on changing patterns of water jets. The pool is at the center of a sunken rock garden which has terraced walls made of granite boulders. Along the entire south side of the rock garden is the observation deck made of granite blocks in the Rustic Style associated with the National Park Service. The fountain with its pool is one contributing object and the rock garden is a second contributing object. The observation deck is a contributing structure. None have been significantly altered, although they all show some deterioration.

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## Narrative Description

In 1937, the Park Board of the City of Virginia, with the assistance of the Works Progress Administration, added a major attraction to Olcott Park, a rectangular piece of land on the city's north side. The city built a fountain and pool within a sunken rock garden and an observation deck along one side from which visitors could observe the floral displays and the operation of the fountain. The entire ensemble occupies a 120 foot square space in the park's northwest quadrant (Photos #1, 2).

The centerpiece is an octagonal fountain structure of pink granite masonry which sits on a concrete base located in the center of the shallow pool (Photo #4). This structure, which is about five feet tall and twelve feet across, houses a General Electric Novalux Seven Projector Electric Fountain, a mechanism which includes pumps capable of shooting water jets to varying heights as well as seven powerful electric lights with color filters which provided changing patterns of colored light on the water jets in the evening hours.<sup>1</sup> The stone fountain structure has sloping ramp-like ornamentation on four of its sides; the other four sides are ornamented with two levels of half-circle basins, a large one on the bottom, and a smaller one above, which catch water falling from above. The top of the structure is flat and open to allow for the water jets and lighting effects. Currently a large, square piece of wood covers the open top area.

The rectangular pool is approximately 64 feet on its east-west axis and 40 feet running north and south. The four corners are double-stepped, giving the pool a Greek or Roman appearance (Photo #5). The floor of the pool and the perimeter wall around the pool are made of concrete treated with a waterproof barrier. Large granite blocks, much darker than the pink granite stonework used in the fountain, cap the concrete perimeter wall around the pool. They measure approximately 17" x 30" x 4" and are larger than the blocks in the fountain.

The pool is centered on the floor of a sunken rock garden. Immediately around the pool is a promenade, about four feet wide, constructed of pink-granite paving stones (Photo #3). The earthen walls of the garden on the east, west, and north side are held in place with two tiers of dry-stack granite field boulders separated by a terrace about three feet wide. The sloping wall rises about three feet to the terrace, and then another three feet to the grade of the surrounding parkland. The observation deck on the south side is built on the level of the bottom row of stones forming the upper tier of field boulders. Below the observation deck is a sloping area for plantings separated from the promenade by field stones at the same level as the stones of the lower tier on the east, west, and north sides.

The raised observation deck extends along the entire southern edge of the rock garden. It is about 12 feet wide and has low walls on both its north and south sides (Photo #6). These walls are constructed of large rusticated pink granite blocks in random ashlar pattern set with beaded mortar joints. The platform is intended to provide optimal viewing of the garden and especially

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Park Commission, *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1938*, 4.

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of the fountain which, until recent years, ran all day during the summer months with lighted displays starting at dusk. For this reason, the north wall of the observation deck juts out two feet for the length of about twelve feet at the center of the deck overlooking the fountain (Photo #8).

The floor of the observation deck is made of granite flagstones. There are entrances, essentially breaks in the granite wall about five feet wide, on the east and west ends. There is a similar entrance at the center point of the south wall, just opposite the place on the north wall which juts out toward the fountain. Each of these entrances is marked by a granite threshold. In addition, there are two openings in the north wall, one near the east end and one near the west end, which access wide stairways down to the promenade around the pool (Photo #7). These stairways are made of granite masonry with heavy capstones, especially at the newel posts at the top and the bottom of the stairways. The steps and risers of the stairways were originally made of granite, but at some point they were replaced with concrete.

The masonry construction of the observation deck, the pool and the fountain exemplifies the Rustic Style associated with the National Park Service. This style dominated architectural and landscape design of the 1930s and 1940s in the national parks, state parks, roadside developments, and in federal relief projects generally. Designers working within this style sought to intrude as little as possible on the natural environment of a park or roadside by emphasizing locally sourced materials, naturally textured surfaces, and horizontal designs with minimal ornamentation. There was also an effort to convey a simple, hand-crafted appearance which avoided any hint of sophistication.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with these concepts, the low walls of the observation deck are constructed completely of large, rough, rusticated granite blocks. The fountain is squat with minimum ornamentation. The rock garden, composed as it is of two rows of granite boulders in an excavated area, is a simple design.

The rock garden, pool, fountain, and observation deck retain their historic integrity because they exhibit the essential physical features that convey their historic significance. Each element is intact and structurally stable. The original materials and design features are mostly in place. The site as a whole conveys a feeling for the 1930s and closely associates the property with the federal relief construction of the era.

However, there is some deterioration due to the harsh climate conditions and occasional minor vandalism.<sup>3</sup> A few of the granite capstones of the pool wall are loose and many of the mortar joints are cracked. As is true of the masonry throughout, the blocks exhibit a heavy layer of biofilm and dirt, and occasionally also of moss and lichen. Although the cement walls of the pool

<sup>2</sup> Susan Granger, "Historic Roadside Development Structure in Minnesota Trunk Highways," Minnesota Department of Highways, 1998, 3.11-3.13.

<sup>3</sup> Much of what follows is based on Kristin Cheronis, Inc. "Olcott Park Fountain Condition Assessment and Long-Range Plan." August 2, 2016. The report was prepared by Laura Kubrick and funded by a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant.

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are intact, the waterproofing liner has failed. The masonry of the fountain structure is sound but exhibits the same problems as the masonry elsewhere.

The pavers on the promenade around the pool have grown uneven and the gaps between them are filled with grass and weeds. The sides of the rock garden have lost a number of granite boulders over the years, and natural erosion has made the grade of the hillsides less steep than when the garden was constructed (Photo #3). Park maintenance workers removed some boulders near the southwest corner to facilitate the movement of lawnmowers into the lower level.

A few blocks are missing from the walls of the observation deck, and many of the mortar joints throughout are cracked. In some areas, mortar joints have been repaired inexpertly with cement in a different color. As elsewhere, the pink granite blocks are uniformly covered by a layer of biofilm and dirt and occasionally also by lichen and moss. The flagstones that make up the floor of the observation deck have also grown uneven over the years, and grass and weeds have grown up between them.

Historic photos and the park superintendent's reports indicate that when the fountain was first activated eighty years ago the site was surrounded by coniferous trees and shrubs, primarily spruce, juniper and arborvitae (Figure #5, 6).<sup>4</sup> In addition, there were low coniferous shrubs planted on the observation deck along the southern wall, and below the northern wall of the deck in the rock garden. The park horticulturist planted a wide variety of perennials and annuals as well as shrubs in the terraced beds of the rock garden. At some point, four clumps of juniper shrubs were inappropriately planted in the beds below the north wall of the observation deck. These shrubs eventually became massively overgrown, completely blocking the view of the fountain from the observation deck (Figure #9). They were cut down in September 2016, but the stumps were left in place pending an evaluation of their structural impact on the masonry wall. The former flower beds on the terraces of the rock garden are now filled with grass.

The city was able to operate the General Electric fountain until 2013. By that time leakage in the pool made water circulation to the pumps difficult. In addition, replacement parts for the fountain mechanism were no longer available. Plans are underway to restore the fountain to its original working order and repair the observation deck and rock garden. As the recent condition assessment report concluded, "it will be possible to restore the site, preserving the historic intent of the WPA planners and allowing new generations to enjoy the Fountain and the Rock Garden."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Park Commission, *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1938*, 4. Some of these trees are still present on the south and west sides, just outside the 120-foot square containing the rock garden and observation deck that marks the boundaries of this National Register nomination. Unfortunately, the trees along the south border are just a few feet from the south wall of the observation deck. Their root systems may eventually compromise the structural integrity of the deck.

<sup>5</sup> Kristin Cheronis, Inc., p 1.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT  
ENGINEERING

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1935-1937

**Significant Dates**

1935  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Charles Hanford, Jr., Landscape Architect

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden is locally significant under **Criterion A** in the area of Politics/Government as an example of a local partnership with the Works Progress Administration to provide an unusual public space which made a significant and lasting contribution to the social life of Virginia. The WPA-supported construction of the fountain and rock garden not only delivered short term unemployment relief during the Depression, but also provided the community with a social and recreational facility which entertained the community and visitors until several years ago. The Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden is also locally significant under **Criterion C** in the area of Engineering as an example of an innovative, electrically-powered, colored-light fountain produced during the 1930s by a nationally recognized manufacturer. It was a unique federal relief project in Minnesota. The period of significance is 1935-1937, the years of construction. This property is related to the statewide historic contexts of "Minnesota Iron Ore Industry, 1880-1945" and assessed using the Multiple Property Documentation Form "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943."

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### *The Queen City of the Range*

Virginia traces its origins back to the discovery of massive iron ore deposits near Lake Superior in the Nineteenth Century. The development of mining in this region began in the upper peninsula of Michigan with the Marquette Iron Range prior to the Civil War and the Gogebic Range in the 1880s. Across the lake in the Arrowhead Region of northern Minnesota, prospectors discovered ore on the Vermilion Range in the 1880s, the much larger Mesabi Range in the 1890s, and finally the Cuyuna Range to the south in 1911. These three ranges are known collectively in Minnesota as "the Iron Range." Virginia became one of the largest towns on the Mesabi Range and a major commercial center for the entire Iron Range.<sup>6</sup>

This region was Dakota land until the mid-Eighteenth Century when the Ojibwe began to move into the area as a result of European incursions into their ancestral lands to the east. At that time, the French were the only Europeans in the Arrowhead and their primary interest was the fur trade. After statehood, unfounded rumors led to a brief gold rush to Lake Vermilion which resulted in a wagon road being opened to Duluth. This set the stage for the discovery of iron ore on the Vermilion Range in the 1880s. Prospectors moved south and west in 1890 and found abundant ore near the surface on the Mesabi Range. By 1892, the Mountain Iron mine began

<sup>6</sup> Arnold R. Alanen, "Years of Change on the Iron Range" in Clifford E. Clark, Ed. *Minnesota in a Century of Change* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 155-156.

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shipping ore on the Duluth and Missabe Railroad to Duluth, and soon there were many productive mines on the Mesabi Range.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most productive of the new mines was the Missabe Mountain Mine near the center of the Mesabi Range. Its success prompted a group of entrepreneurs led by A. E. Humphreys to select neighboring land for a town site and obtain formal recognition as a village from St. Louis County in September 1892.<sup>8</sup> They chose the name Virginia because it was Humphreys' home state and because of the virgin quality of the land.<sup>9</sup> When incorporated, Virginia was a small settlement reached only by a barely passable road. However, a branch line of the Duluth, Missabe and Northern railroad was put through from Mountain Iron to Virginia just a few months later. This fueled the growth of the new town, and soon there were many businesses including a sawmill, a hotel, and a newspaper.

This impressive debut was cut short in June 1893 when a brush fire and a strong wind combined to burn Virginia down. The town was quickly rebuilt, and once the economy had recovered from the Depression of 1893, Virginia's rapid growth resumed. In 1895, it was incorporated as a city, and soon had amenities including a telephone company and a community hall. In 1900, however, a sawmill caught fire, leading to a conflagration which destroyed Virginia a second time. Once again the citizens rebuilt, although this time city officials ruled that all buildings on Chestnut Street, the main commercial thoroughfare, be constructed of brick, stone, or concrete.

Virginia's population in 1900 was nearly 3,000, and it rebounded quickly after the second fire and reached 10,473 by the 1910 census, and 14,022 by 1920.<sup>10</sup> This was the result not only of the large number of iron ore mines in the vicinity but also the fact that Virginia had become a sawmilling center. The first sawmill was erected in 1895, and eventually the Virginia and Rainy Lake Lumber Company, part of Frederick Weyerhaeuser's holdings, employed 1,500 men and women in Virginia at what was thought to be the largest white pine sawmill in the world.<sup>11</sup>

The majority of Iron Range residents in the early days were foreign born and worked in the mines or sawmills. In Virginia, the residents were primarily Finns, Croatians and Swedes, with substantial numbers of Norwegians, Canadians (both British and French), Irish, Italians, Germans, Poles, Serbs, and Slovenians. A small number of Jews and Chinese had small

<sup>7</sup> David A. Walker, *Iron Frontier: the Discovery and Early Development of Minnesota's Three Ranges* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1979), 69-70; Andrew Schmidt et al., "Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2007, 80 (Available at the Minnesota Historic Preservation Office).

<sup>8</sup> Walter Van Brunt, *Duluth and St Louis County, Minnesota: Their Story and People*, 3 Vols. (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921), 586.

<sup>9</sup> Warren Upham, *Minnesota Place Names*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 538.

<sup>10</sup> Van Brunt, 602. Although Virginia's growth was exceptional, it reflected the general population growth on the Iron Range. Although some early settlements did not survive, eventually about fifteen established towns grew to a combined population of 23,490 by 1900 and 100,385 in 1920. Alanen, 159.

<sup>11</sup> Van Brunt, 594.

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businesses in town.<sup>12</sup> In the early days, American-born men, usually of English and Scot ancestry, filled the management positions in the iron and lumber industry, as well as most skilled labor positions. The entrepreneurs who organized the towns and worked as bankers, lawyers, doctors and engineers also tended to be American-born “Yankees” from the East.

To encourage mining, the Minnesota legislature in 1881 imposed a tax of only one cent per ton of iron ore mined and shipped. This tonnage tax was replaced in 1897 by an *ad valorem* tax, essentially a property tax which allowed counties and cities to tax companies for the unmined ore still in the ground. As a result, Iron Range cities controlled tax revenues much larger than most towns and cities of the same size and built public works “far beyond those of most Minnesota cities at the time.”<sup>13</sup> The robust public facilities included water and sewage systems, municipal utilities, city halls, libraries, public restrooms and baths, community centers, recreation facilities, and parks. Virginia built a public library in 1905 with a grant from Andrew Carnegie. Just seven years later, the city decided that it had outgrown its Carnegie library and built a larger one with city tax revenue. In 1910, St. Louis County built a neoclassical courthouse in Virginia, and the city built itself a Georgian Revival city hall in 1923 (NRHP, 2004). Iron Range cities also used mining tax revenue to build some of the best equipped elementary and high schools in the state, exemplified by the Hibbing High School built in 1919-1924 (NRHP, 1980) and by Virginia’s Roosevelt High School built in 1928. Unlike the rest of the state, Iron Range school districts also established junior colleges. In 1921, Virginia and Eveleth both had their own junior colleges. They were combined in 1967 and, in 1968 a new junior college was built and continues today as the Mesabi Range Community and Technical College.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Birth of Olcott Park*

Virginia’s business and political leaders wanted high quality public spaces and had the tax revenues to accomplish their goals. The various mining companies, which after 1900 were mostly consolidated by J. P. Morgan into the United States Steel Company, also took an interest in contributing to the public welfare. Motivated in part by a desire to discourage labor unrest and head off the reform movements of the Progressive Era, the mining companies strengthened safety measures, improved worker housing, and occasionally made a donation to demonstrate their good will to the community.<sup>15</sup> Morgan’s holdings included the Oliver Iron Mining Company, which had developed the Missabe Mountain Mine and eventually controlled many other mines on the Mesabi and Vermilion Range.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Walker, 96; Alanen, 173.

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967, 1975), 377.

<sup>14</sup> Lass, 188, 256; Alanen, 165; Pamela Brunfelt, “Political Culture in Microcosm: Minnesota’s Iron Range,” in Steven M Hoffman, Angela High-Pippert, and Kay Wolsborn, *Perspectives on Minnesota Government and Politics*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2007), 26-27; Paul Landis, *Three Iron Mining Towns* (Ann Arbor, Edwards Brothers, 1938), 72-78.

<sup>15</sup> Alanen, 180.

<sup>16</sup> Marvin Lamma, *Minnesota’s Iron Country* (Duluth: Lake Superior Port Cities, Inc., 2004), 145.

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The city's desire to create a park system and the Oliver Iron Mining Company's interest in community relations coincided in 1905 when the company negotiated an annual lease to the city of a 40-acre section on Virginia's north side, which they had decided they would not be mining. That same year, a protest strike in nearby Hibbing had led to the deaths of two Finnish miners. This was followed in the summer of 1907 by a larger strike throughout the Mesabi Range against "the Oliver," as people in Virginia called the great steel conglomerate.

In 1908, when Virginia was just beginning its investment in public facilities, the president of the city's Commercial Club complained that Virginia lagged behind in the development of parks, playgrounds, public gardens, or even trees along its streets.<sup>17</sup> This prompted the city to create an independent park commission. Perhaps because of the labor unrest, nothing had yet been done to improve the 40-acre section leased from Oliver Mining. In 1910, the park commission negotiated a 10-year lease of the 40-acre parcel in return for paying all taxes and assessments. The land was christened Olcott Park in honor of W. J. Olcott, head of Oliver Mining.<sup>18</sup> The lease gave the city the right to improve the land but reserved the rights to any minerals below the surface for the mining company. The city committed itself to using the land strictly as a public park, meaning that there would be no fences to exclude the public from the grounds and no exhibitions or athletic contests at which admission was charged. "No lodge or club or private organization," the park commission proclaimed, "will have any advantage over the humblest or poorest resident of the city." The lease also permanently banned the sale of intoxicating beverages in the park.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately after the lease was signed, the park commission made significant investments in the park. By the end of the summer, the park had about two miles of roadways as well as a network of crushed rock walkways. There was also playground equipment and the beginnings of a "zoo" consisting of a few bear, deer, and peafowl. A bandstand was constructed, and on August 21, 1910, the Virginia City Band gave a free concert, inaugurating a long-standing tradition that continues to the present time.<sup>20</sup>

The development of Olcott Park during its first five years was overseen by park superintendent Arthur A. Beischjold, a native of Holland who had wide experience in horticulture and landscaping in Europe including in Norway where he met his wife. After coming to the United States, he worked with the park systems of Chicago, Pittsburg, and Duluth before coming to Virginia to become the first superintendent of parks. Later he worked for the city of Chisholm

<sup>17</sup> Marvin Skaurud, *A History of Virginia, MN* (University of Minnesota Master's Thesis, 1941), 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> W. J. Olcott started out as a mining superintendent in Ironwood, Michigan. In 1894, he became the director of Rockefeller's Lake Superior Consolidated Iron Mines. After the United States Steel consolidation, he became vice president of the Oliver Iron Mining Company, and eventually its president. Walker, 203; Van Brunt, 414-415.

<sup>19</sup> Albert E. Bickford, *Financial History of Virginia, Minnesota, May 1, 1911* (City of Virginia, 1911), 17-20. Available at the Virginia Area Historical Society archives. "Hawkinson Tells Rotary Club of Park's History," *Virginia Daily Enterprise (VDE)*, June 11, 1936, 10. The lease was renewed in 1920 and again in 1930.

<sup>20</sup> "Named the 'Olcott' Park—Band Concert will be given free Sunday afternoon," *The Virginian*, August 19, 1910. Linda Tyssen, "City Band Plays On," *Mesabi Daily New (MDN)*, July 8, 2007.

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and other towns before retiring to a rural home near Virginia.<sup>21</sup> The city built a sturdy cottage in the center of the park just east of the bandstand, and Beischjold was the first of several park superintendents to live in the Olcott Park house with their families.<sup>22</sup>

Events during the summer of 1911 demonstrated how important the park would be to the city. For the park's formal opening on Sunday, May 28, 1911, the superintendent decorated the park with flags and bunting to welcome thousands of Virginians who came to view the park's new improvements. Children enjoyed the new swings and "metal shoots," families had picnics, and many visited the zoo, which now featured elk, deer, and a bear cage with a swimming pool for the four cubs.<sup>23</sup> About a week later, the entire school population of Virginia, 2,600 pupils, marched from their schools to Olcott Park for an all-school picnic.<sup>24</sup> A few weeks after that, the Northern Minnesota Finnish Temperance Society hosted its annual Midsummer Picnic, which attracted many out of town visitors to Olcott Park, including Governor A. O. Eberhardt, who was the featured speaker.<sup>25</sup>

The land which became Olcott Park was primarily a cutover section of former pine forest. As a result, tree planting was a large priority in the park's early decades. The park superintendent reported in his spring 1917 report that over 900 trees had been planted in the park, especially maples, poplars and elms. He noted that the park still seemed "quite barren of shade" and that he planned to plant an additional 200 trees in the coming spring.<sup>26</sup> By 1934, the superintendent inventoried 1,380 trees in the park, and by this time, native elms were the dominant species, followed by maples, ash, and spruce.<sup>27</sup> In the following year, he reported that 63 native white cedars and 14 white spruce had been planted.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to tree planting, the city continued to vigorously develop Olcott Park's attractions and amenities under the second park superintendent, R. D. Philbrick. In 1915, the city replaced the original bandstand with a more substantial wooden octagonal structure which was made of wood but had an overhanging roof supported by concrete pillars. About the same time, the city built a Refectory Building just north of the center road near the superintendent's house. This one-story building, razed long ago, was surrounded by a veranda sheltered by pergolas.<sup>29</sup> At that time, the

<sup>21</sup> "Death Ends Colorful Career of Arthur A. Beischjold, Architect of Virginia Parks and Son of a Dutch Baron," *MDN*, January 5, 1953, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Bickford, 20.

<sup>23</sup> "Opening of Olcott Park a Great Success," *Virginia Enterprise (VE)*, June 2, 1911, 6.

<sup>24</sup> "Schools Enjoy a Big Picnic," *VE*, June 9, 1911, 1.

<sup>25</sup> "Governor A. O. Eberhart will speak at Olcott Park," *The Virginian*, June 23, 1911, p 3; "An Enormous Crowd in Prospect: The Finnish Midsummer Celebration will draw people from every point of Range," *VE*, June 23, 1911, p. 1; "Thousands Attend Midsummer Picnic," *VE*, June 30, 1911, 1

<sup>26</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1917.*

<sup>27</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1934.*

<sup>28</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1935.*

<sup>29</sup> An historic photo marked "Olcott Park, 1916" at the Virginia Area Historical Society archives gives a good view of this building.

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park also opened an up-to-date “comfort station” with tile floors and modern fixtures.<sup>30</sup> The superintendent’s house was moved to its present location on the park’s eastern border in 1916.

The development of the park’s amenities and landscaping was guided by Morell & Nichols, a Minneapolis landscape architecture firm which had been organized in 1909. A city report from 1911 mentions that the city was executing a “special design for a public park” prepared by a “Minneapolis park expert.” The city recently found a 1918 landscape plan signed by Morell and Nichols in storage and it is likely that the firm had been engaged shortly after the 10-year lease was signed in 1910.<sup>31</sup> Anthony Morell and Arthur Nichols were remarkably prolific designers whose projects included master plans for cities, parks, cemeteries, sanatoriums, schools, colleges, and private estates. Although based in the Twin Cities, they had significant projects in northeastern Minnesota, including Morgan Park, the company town they designed for U.S. Steel in Duluth in 1917. Morell died in 1927, after which Nichols worked primarily for the state, designing state parks, waysides, overlooks, and public institutions. In 1944, he designed the State Capitol Approach site in St. Paul.<sup>32</sup>

In 1916, the city replaced the original wood gates along 9<sup>th</sup> Street North with three sets of much more elaborate stone gates designed by Morell & Nichols.<sup>33</sup> The gates at the northeast and northwest corners survive, but the third gate, known as Central Gate in early postcards, is no longer extant.<sup>34</sup> The stone gates in Olcott Park are very much like Nichols’ Depression era designs for state parks and roadside amenities in which he blended the Rustic Style associated with the National Park Service “with slightly more formal, classically-inspired forms.”<sup>35</sup>

The park commission also invested in the expansion of the zoo. In the late nineteenth century, it was common for cities to include zoos in their emerging municipal parks. These early zoos, often the result of abandoned pets or escaped circus animals, were considered suitable attractions for urban dwellers seeking outdoor recreation.<sup>36</sup> Virginia followed the same path, expanding its zoo by adding more indigenous mammals (moose, wolves, coyotes, and badgers), several exotic game birds, and a few monkeys, all of which required cages and other structures.<sup>37</sup> The monkeys

<sup>30</sup> “Band Stand at Olcott Park to be used Sunday,” *VE*, June 18, 1915, 1

<sup>31</sup> Bickford, 20. The 1918 plan did not include the fountain that is the subject of this nomination.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory Kopischke, “Anthony Morell and Arthur Nichols,” pp 253-257 in Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson, eds, *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000); Frank Edgerton Martin, *Valued Places: Landscape Architecture in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Landscape Architects, 2001), unpaginated.

<sup>33</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1917*.

<sup>34</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1917*.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Granger, et al. “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota 1933-1941,” *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, amended 2002, F40. (Available at the Minnesota Historic Preservation Office).

<sup>36</sup> Vernon N. Kislung, Jr. *Zoo and Aquarium History: Ancient Animal Collections to Zoological Gardens* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2000), 152-154.

<sup>37</sup> “Epoch of Progress in Northern Minnesota” Illustrated Supplement to the *Daily Virginian*, 1915.

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proved very popular, and by 1925, the park had constructed a special building for them. Later, bison and big-horn sheep would be added to the collection.

In 1921, the first greenhouse was built to the south of the superintendent's house along the eastern boundary of the park.<sup>38</sup> Two years later, the park commission hired Gunnar Peterson as the park's horticulturist. He was the second man with wide experience in European horticulture to contribute to the development of Olcott Park. He grew up working in his father's greenhouse in Sweden and later worked in greenhouses in Germany, and after emigrating, in Chicago. He used the greenhouse to prepare plants for his increasingly elaborate flower beds. Soon, the park superintendent noted that a larger greenhouse was needed, and an addition was added to the north of the original wing in 1926.

### *The Development of Olcott Park during the New Deal*

The booming iron ore production of the 1920s came to a crashing halt with the onset of the Great Depression. Ore production fell from 47 million tons in 1929 to less than 2 million in 1932, the year in which production across the three Minnesota ranges came to a virtual standstill. Mines closed, thousands were laid off, retail sales slumped, tax revenues declined, and government services were cut back. A "Hooverville" appeared on the outskirts of Virginia, and the city's healthy tax revenues were curtailed.<sup>39</sup>

In March 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt took office and quickly began the New Deal, a series of federal interventions intended to blunt the impact of the Depression and revitalize the economy. Among other things, the New Deal created a number of job-creation programs geared to the development of public works projects in cooperation with the states and local communities. All of these programs had an impact on the Iron Range.

The first to make a difference was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) which put young unemployed men to work on reforestation, soil conservation, and park improvements. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) supplied direct grants to states which used the money to put thousands to work, mostly in construction and repair projects. In Minnesota, local government units sent their applications to the State Board of Control.<sup>40</sup> The Public Works Administration (PWA) was also created during the "hundred days" in 1933, but it took longer to get its projects in motion.<sup>41</sup> The PWA did not directly employ workers, but gave grants and loans to federal agencies and states and their subdivisions to fund major projects built by private contractors. Nationwide, it funded 34,500 public works projects, including city halls, schools,

<sup>38</sup> Because 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue North, which today forms the eastern boundary of the park, did not exist until the 1940s, the superintendent's house and the greenhouse faced west into the park.

<sup>39</sup> Marvin Lamppa, *Minnesota's Iron Country* (Duluth: Lake Superior Port Cities, 2004), 220.

<sup>40</sup> Rolf T. Anderson, "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943," *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 1991, E1 (Available at the Minnesota Historic Preservation Office).

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, E29.



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sewage treatment plants, dams, bridges, and the like. In Minnesota, the PWA funded 666 federal and non-federal projects, including such major works as the Minneapolis Armory and Dam 5-A on the Mississippi near Winona.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Roosevelt became impatient with the pace of hiring and created the Civil Works Administration (CWA) that employed 4.5 million workers in the winter of 1933-34. It generated fierce opposition and was terminated after five months. At that point, the FERA established a new work relief program, commonly known as the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) to take CWA's place.<sup>43</sup> In 1935, Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA), an agency designed to provide massive unemployment relief by directly hiring the unemployed to build public works or work in service projects in such fields as adult education, recreation, and public art. The WPA acted as general contractor of building projects and put a high priority on employing as many unemployed workers as possible. As a result, WPA projects tended to be smaller and less complex than PWA projects, which were completed by established construction firms. Like the PWA, the WPA required that a local governmental unit share the cost of the project. By the time it ended in 1943, the WPA had helped build 1,324 new public buildings in Minnesota, as well as many bridges, roads, culverts, sidewalks, swimming pools, stadiums, sewage and water treatment plants, and three new airports.<sup>44</sup>

Iron ore mining in Minnesota would rebound strongly when World War II led to a massive increase in demand for steel. During the Depression, however, Iron Range towns were not able to fund public projects at the level to which they had grown accustomed. The various New Deal programs filled the void and allowed for the continued expansion of public infrastructure and services. Under the direction of park superintendent Arthur F. Thayer, the city of Virginia took advantage of these various federal programs to continue the development of Olcott Park in three important areas.<sup>45</sup>

In 1932, the city had begun a large greenhouse addition which was intended not just for the nurturing but also for the exhibiting of plants. In the winter of 1933-1934, the city got extensive help from the CWA to complete this project.<sup>46</sup> In November 1933, the city held the first chrysanthemum show in the new greenhouse even though work was still ongoing.<sup>47</sup> Under the supervision of park horticulturist Gunnar W. Peterson, the annual chrysanthemum show became one of the greenhouse's signature events, eclipsed only by Peterson's popular begonia shows

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, E10.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, E38.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, E59; Linus Glotzbach, *WPA Accomplishments: Minnesota 1935-1939* (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Works Progress Administration, 1939). This work is unpaginated.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur F. Thayer (1870-1943) served as Virginia's park superintendent from around 1920 until his retirement at in 1936. Prior to that, he was the fire chief, having been appointed in 1908 when Virginia created a salaried fire department. Van Brunt, 601. Carl Hawkinson took over as park superintendent in 1936 and served until his death in 1943. His daughter Ardys Hawkinson Nelson wrote about growing up in the house in *Growing Up in Olcott Park* (Walnut Creek, CA: Cal Creek Publishing, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1934*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1934*, 4.

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each year in August.<sup>48</sup> Peterson also gained fame with his floral exhibitions in raised beds in the center of the park north of the bandstand, drawing visitors from around the state and beyond. In 1934, for example, Peterson designed a massive display which spelled out “In honor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Leader of our Nation.” The display won national notice and an acknowledgment from the president.<sup>49</sup>

The city also secured CWA and ERA assistance for two significant expansions of Olcott Park’s zoo. With CWA labor, the park built a mountain sheep enclosure with a rock shelter for them in 1932.<sup>50</sup> Two years later, the park enlisted WPA workers to build a stone hill for the animals to climb within the enclosure.<sup>51</sup> The other improvement was the construction of Monkey Island, a stone castle-like structure surrounded by a water-filled moat and a high circular retaining wall with a circumference of 310 feet. CWA labor did the preparatory excavation, and then the project was completed in 1934 with ERA assistance. Superintendent Thayer noted that the monkeys quickly had become the zoo’s big attraction, bringing a steady stream of visitors to the park.<sup>52</sup>

Although the greenhouse, floral displays, and zoo animals brought thousands of visitors to Olcott Park, the park commissioners wanted to add one more major attraction. In 1934, they became interested in the idea of mounting an electric fountain within a rock garden, and according to the superintendent’s report, several commissioners traveled to inspect rock gardens in different parts of the country.<sup>53</sup> The superintendent’s report does not mention why they were interested in an electric fountain, but they may have been influenced by the Century of Progress Exposition held on Chicago’s lakefront during the summers of 1933 and 1934. Many Minnesotans visited the exposition which celebrated technological innovation as an antidote to the gloom of the Great Depression. Electricity was a major focus and companies like General Electric created popular displays in the Electrical Building as well as elaborate searchlight displays and dramatic lighting of buildings outside after dark. General Electric showcased its Novalux Electric Fountain technology in three coordinated fountains in the fair’s south lagoon.<sup>54</sup> After dark, the crowds, which may have included visitors from the Iron Range, watched the 70 underwater colored floodlights illuminate water sprayed by 507 water jets (Figure #1). General Electric provided colorful booklets detailing the various models of Electric Fountains they offered for sale, ranging from a 35 projector model for a large public fountain to smaller three-projector “estate models”

<sup>48</sup> “Virginia Park Begonia Beds Lure Tourists,” *Duluth News-Tribune*, August 11, 1940.

<sup>49</sup> “President Roosevelt Acknowledges Photographs Received of Flower Bed at the Olcott Park,” *VE*, November 24, 1934, 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1934*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1936*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1935*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1937*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Lisa D. Schrenk, *Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933-34 World's Fair* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 109-110.

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for private homes. The “standard” models, the advertising material suggested, were the seven and nine-projector versions.<sup>55</sup>

The city obtained federal approval for the project in 1935. That same year workers hired by the WPA completed the preliminary excavation and plumbing for the large rectangular, terraced rock garden and fountain located in the center of the northwest quadrangle of the park.<sup>56</sup> The city hired Charles Hanford, Jr., a landscape architect from Independence, Missouri, to design the fountain, rock garden, and observation deck. His sketch of the fountain complex and how it might be integrated into the landscape of the park survives, but only his design for the stone work and fountain were realized (Figure #2). His design for the observation deck followed the Rustic Style with which Morell and Nichols had designed the park gates along Ninth Street North. The design for the fountain structure used the same form of rusticated masonry. In the spring of 1936, the city sought bids for the concrete required for the pool and fountain. This work was completed by WPA labor during the summer (Figure #3, 4). At that time they also sought bids from electrical contractors to supply and install a General Electric Seven Projector Novalux Electric Fountain. According to the specifications provided by GE, the projectors would have 1500 watt lamps, two with red filters, one with amber, two with green, and two with blue. The mechanism would also include a jet ring with 65 jets as well as other nozzles to spray water. The control system would be completely automatic and capable of producing 60 water and light combinations over a 360 second period.<sup>57</sup>

The Novalux fountain was installed and the masonry completed in the spring and summer of 1937 (Figure #5). The fountain, which put on its multi-color display every evening, weather permitting, from 8:30 to 10:00, debuted on August 16, 1937. The daughter of the park superintendent Carl Hawkinson wrote that the night before, she was with her father and a crew of WPA workers who tested the fountain. The effect, she wrote, “was lovelier than the annual Fourth of July fireworks.” The water gushed from the fountain, “sometimes high, sometimes low, sometimes wide, sometimes narrow,” and colored lights played on the streams of water, red, green, blue, yellow in complementary combinations.”<sup>58</sup> Superintendent Hawkinson reported that police assistance was needed to control the crowds thronging to see the fountain the next day, and that interest in the fountain continued unabated until cold weather in the fall necessitated the draining of the pool.<sup>59</sup> The landscaping, including the planting of coniferous trees around the border of the site, was not part of the WPA project and was completed in 1938 (Figure #6, 7).<sup>60</sup> In any case the trees were planted too close to the masonry and as they became overgrown, threatened the structural integrity of the property.

<sup>55</sup> The files of the Virginia Park Department contain a General Electric advertising booklet describing the various Novalux Electric Fountain models.

<sup>56</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1936*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> General Electric Company, “Specifications” (in the files of the Virginia Park Commission). In 1935, a similar fountain was built in Alliance, Nebraska with WPA labor.

<sup>58</sup> Nelson, 47.

<sup>59</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1938*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1939*, P-5.

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### *The Fountain During the Park's Heyday*

The completion of the electric fountain and rock garden began the era of Olcott Park's greatest popularity. Visitors were entertained by the zoo animals, the band concerts, the dramatic flower beds, the greenhouse displays, and now the fountain and its rock garden, especially at dusk when the colored light display began (Figure #8). In 1938, the city purchased most of the park land from the steel company and negotiated a lease on a portion of the land on the southern boundary which the company sought to retain as a right of way to an adjacent property. To deal with increased traffic into the park, the city rebuilt the main entrance gate at the northeast corner of the park so that it had two openings, one for incoming traffic and one for traffic exiting the park.

This new gate followed the Rustic Style of the original gate and it is likely that the central stone gate was razed at this time and the stone used to expand the main gate.<sup>61</sup>

World War II brought an end to new development in the park and during the war years the animal population of the zoo shrank. The fountain also suffered from the war. In 1943, the bronze gears operating the mechanism that produced the constantly changing water jets and colored lights wore out. It took the park department nearly a year to obtain replacement parts because bronze was a critical war material. The parts were finally obtained at the end of August, 1944, and the evening color displays were renewed for the final weeks of summer.<sup>62</sup>

After the war all the attractions in the park returned to normal. Visitors were entertained by the monkeys and enthralled by the electric fountain. The local and tropical plants in the greenhouse sustained many guests, especially during the long northern Minnesota winter. The families and groups used the parks for picnics and festivals.<sup>63</sup> In a booklet published in 1947, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce bragged that Olcott Park "competes for popularity only with the finest parks in the nation through its elaborate flower displays, its geyser-like colored electric fountain, its zoo, playground, and picnic facilities..." The Chamber went on to describe the evening displays of the electric fountain, which it claimed, was "one of the few in the United States."

In the 1960s, the park commission found that maintaining a zoo was becoming increasingly difficult and costly, especially in light of the professionalization of zoo keeping and the increased expectations of how animals should be cared for and displayed.<sup>64</sup> In the summer of 1964, the park superintendent decided to close Monkey Island after a number of monkeys had been killed by vandals.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> "A New Gate," *Queen City Sun*, July 18, 1941; *Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1942*.

<sup>62</sup> "Park Fountain Operating Again," September 1, 1944.

<sup>63</sup> For example, the Federation of Finnish Civic Clubs held its summer festival at the park on a Sunday in July 1964, at which candidates made speeches and entertainment was provided by the Virginia City Band. "11 Candidates Speak at Civic Fete Sunday," *MDN*, July 14, 1964, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Kisling, 170-176. For example, veterinary science had become much more sophisticated with respect to animal diseases and proper nutrition.

<sup>65</sup> "Park Officials Plead for Parents' Help as 5<sup>th</sup> Monkey is Killed at Park," *MDN*, June 22, 1964, 1.

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Until lack of funding led to staff cutbacks, the greenhouse continued to thrive and attract large crowds to its chrysanthemum and begonia shows. The city's last full time horticulturist retired in 1998.<sup>66</sup> At that time, citizens organized the Friends of the Greenhouse to raise funds for the greenhouse and furnish the volunteers who keep the Botanical Garden, as the tropical displays in the greenhouse's main room are now called, open year round.

The last superintendent to live in the park retired in 1993. The Virginia Area Historical Society opened its museum and archives in the former superintendent's home in 1994. The society converted the garage into a main entrance and built a small parking lot along 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue. They moved an historic log cabin and one of the surviving tourist cabins from the tourist camp that the city had built across 9<sup>th</sup> Street in 1930 to a spot next to the house.

Since 1977, Olcott Park has been the home of the Land of the Loon Ethnic Arts and Crafts Festival, a large fair featuring over 300 vendors. The park is also the site of other annual events involving hundreds of people, such as the last-day-of-school picnics and the Labor Day picnic. The Virginia City Band continues to play summer concerts at the bandstand as it has done since Olcott Park opened in 1910.<sup>67</sup> As always, people celebrate graduations, birthdays, and weddings in the park.

The city managed to keep the Electric Fountain repaired and operating until 2013 when the city had to shut it down because the pool's waterproof lining had failed and replacement parts for the fountain could no longer be obtained.<sup>68</sup> The city acquired a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant to hire Kristin Cheronis, Inc. to prepare a conservation assessment and long range preservation plan for the electric fountain and rock garden. This assessment was completed in August 2016 and fundraising continues.<sup>69</sup>

It is not known how many Novalux Electric Fountains were installed in Minnesota or the Midwest, but available evidence indicates that this was a unique New Deal project in Minnesota and very likely the only surviving Novalux fountain in the state. A few examples survive in the greater Midwest. With WPA assistance, the city of Alliance, Nebraska installed a Novalux Seven-Projector Electric Fountain in its Central Park in 1935. By 1985, the fountain was no longer operable. A citizens' campaign raised the funds to restore it to working order with a new electronic mechanism in 1988 and it was added to the National Register in 1990.<sup>70</sup> The city of

<sup>66</sup> Margaret Haapoja's, "A Paradise Close at Hand: Olcott Park Greenhouse in Virginia, Minnesota is a well-kept secret that deserves more attention," *Minnesota Horticulturist*, March 1994.

<sup>67</sup> Linda Tyssen, "City Band Plays On," *MDN*, July 8, 2007. The park rebuilt the bandstand in 1947, and again in 1997.

<sup>68</sup> The park superintendent's report dated January 30, 1984 noted that the fountain had been repaired and had run during the previous summer. Elroy Ornberg, the superintendent, noted that "we have received many compliments on the fountain."

<sup>69</sup> Kristin Cheronis, Inc. "Olcott Park Fountain Condition Assessment and Long-Range Plan." August 2, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Debra Hopheide and Carol Ahlgren, "City of Alliance Central Park Fountain," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 1990. The fountain was listed under Criterion C in the area of Engineering.

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Davenport, Iowa installed a Novalux Seven Projector Electric Fountain in Vander Veer Park in 1935. In 1985, the park was made part of the Vander Veer Park National Register Historic District which includes the neighboring historic homes. This fountain has also been restored with a new mechanism which replicates the water and colored light effects of the original.<sup>71</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The Multiple Property Documentation Form *Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota 1933-1943* explains that a recreational facility built with WPA assistance is eligible under **Criterion A** if it represented a major contribution to the community.<sup>72</sup> Beginning in 1937, the Electric Fountain and Rock Garden attracted many visitors to Olcott Park, and especially, after sundown, entertained them throughout the period of significance. Accordingly, it is locally significant in the area of Government/Politics as a distinctive example of a local partnership with the WPA to provide a lasting recreational facility to the Iron Range.

The Multiple Property Documentation Form *Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota 1933-1943* explains that a recreational facility associated with the New Deal is eligible under **Criterion C** if it represents the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. The General Electric Novalux Seven Projector Electric Fountain was a technological innovation of the 1930s, and the installation in Virginia was unusual and possibly unique in the state. It is locally significant in the area of Engineering as a distinctive example of an innovative technology which still has the power to delight visitors.

<sup>71</sup> John Williard, "Vander Veer Fountain's Colorful History," *Quad City Times*, July 22, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, F27.

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#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark



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\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

\_\_\_ State Historic Preservation Office  
\_\_\_ Federal agency  
\_\_\_ Local government  
\_\_\_ University  
 Other: Virginia Area Historical Society Heritage Museum (Virginia)  
Iron Range Research Center (Chisholm)

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** SL-DUL-3335

**10. Data** **Acree of Property** Less than one acre

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15 Easting: 533790 Northing: 5263950

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The approximately 120 x 120 foot square parcel in the northwest quadrant of Olcott Park which is delineated by the line of granite boulders which form the top of the rock garden walls on the east, west, and north sides of the parcel, and by the southerly edge of the granite observation deck along the south side of the parcel.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary encompasses but does not exceed the area containing the historic fountain, pool, rock garden and observation deck. Territory outside of this boundary was not part of WPA efforts and does not contribute to the property's historic significance.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Greg Gaut  
organization: Historic Preservation Consultant  
street & number: 1235 Yale Place #408  
city or town: Minneapolis state: MN zip code: 55403  
e-mail GregGaut@gmail.com telephone: 612-200-9494  
date: January 3, 2017

Olcott Park Electric Fountain  
and Rock Garden

Name of Property

St. Louis County,  
Minnesota  
County and State

### **Additional Documentation**

- **USGS map**
- **Site maps**
- **Photo Log**

Name of Property: Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden  
City or Vicinity: Virginia County: St. Louis State: Minnesota  
Photographer: Greg Gaut  
Date Photographed: October 2016

Photo #1: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0001)  
View of the fountain, pool, garden, and observation deck, camera facing southwest.

Photo #2: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0002)  
View of the fountain, pool, and garden from the observation deck, camera facing northeast.

Photo #3: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0003)  
View of the east side of the promenade around the pool, the east side of the rock garden, and the easterly staircase to the observation deck, camera facing south.

Photo #4: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0004)  
The granite structure which houses the electric fountain, camera facing northwest.

Photo #5: (MN\_St. Louis Coounty\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0005)  
Detail of the northeast corner of the pool, camera facing north.

Photo #6: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0006)  
View of the observation deck, camera facing west.

Photo #7: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0007)  
The westerly staircase of the observation deck to the pool, camera facing southeast.

Photo #8: (MN\_St. Louis County\_ Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden \_0008)  
The bumped out section at the center of the north wall of the observation deck overlooking the pool, camera facing northwest.

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Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden
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County and State

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**Historic Images and Site Maps**

- Figure #1: The first page (497) of the article “The Miracle of Light at the World’s Fair” in the October 1934 issue of *Popular Mechanics* featuring the General Electric Company’s Novalux electric fountains in the South Lagoon of the Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago 1933-1934. The article explored the innovative use of lighting at the exhibition.
- Figure #2: Landscape Design for Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden by Charles Hanford, Jr, Landscape Architect, circa 1935. (Courtesy of the Virginia Park Department)
- Figure #3: The rock garden and electric fountain under construction in May 1936. (Photo 1729 from the Works Progress Administration collection at the Minnesota Historical Society)
- Figure #4: From a news article in the August 6, 1936 edition of the *Virginia Daily Enterprise*.
- Figure #5: The rock garden and electric fountain with construction nearly completed in 1937. (Photo 4443 from the Works Progress Administration collection at the Minnesota Historical Society)
- Figure #6: Postcard offering an early aerial view of the Electric Fountain and Rock Garden with its original landscaping, circa 1940. (From the collections of the Virginia Area Historical Society)
- Figure #7: An early photo, circa late 1930s, showing the rock garden and the electric fountain as it operated during the daylight hours. (From the collections of the Virginia Area Historical Society)
- Figure #8: An early postcard which attempted to represent the effects produced by the electric fountain in its post-sunset displays. (From the collections of the Virginia Area Historical Society)
- Figure #9: A photo taken about 2013 when the fountain was still operating, camera facing south. Note the four juniper trees planted tight against the observation deck wall obscuring the view of the fountain. These were cut down in 2016. Photo courtesy of the Virginia Park Department
- Figure #10: Google Earth shot of Olcott Park showing location of the Electric Fountain and Rock Garden.
- Figure #11: Google Earth shot of northwest quadrant of Olcott Park showing camera angles of logged photographs.
- Figure #12: Google Earth shot showing the boundary of the historic resource.

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Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden

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Figure #1

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Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden

Name of Property

St. Louis County, Minnesota

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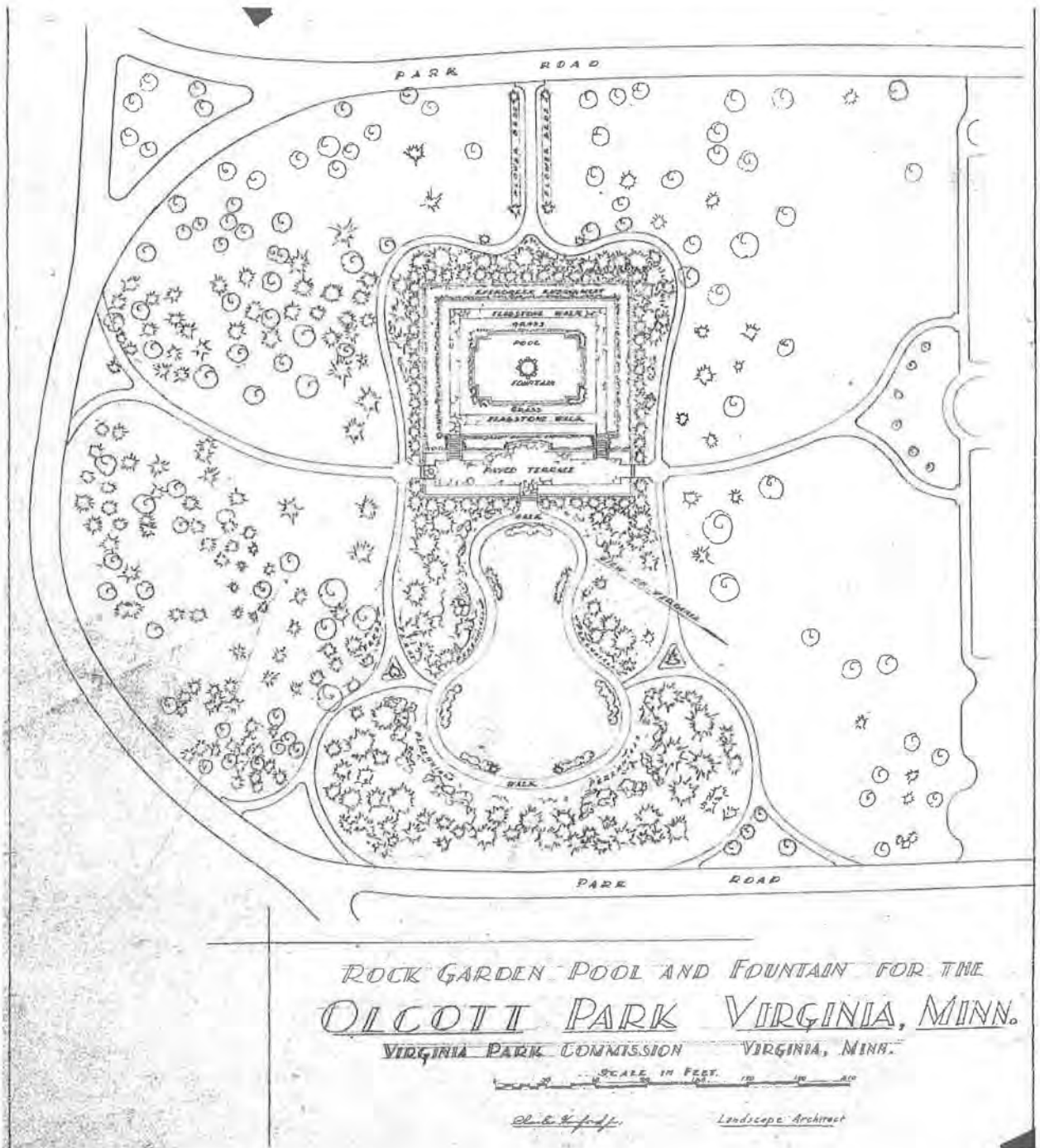


Figure #2

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden

Name of Property

St. Louis County, Minnesota

County and State

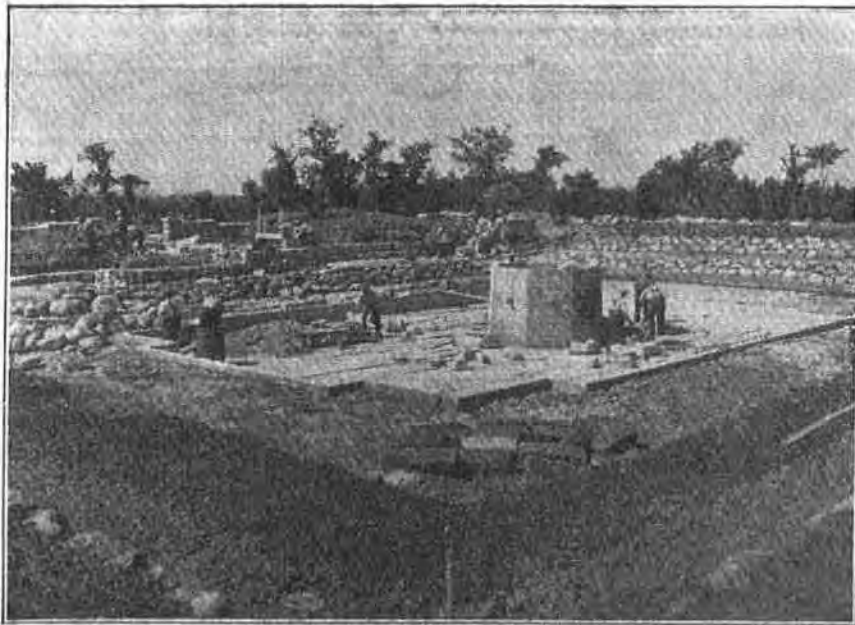
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Figure #3

Virginia's Rock Garden Being Built



Out of the above rocks, masonry and concrete will come another beauty spot for Virginia when WPA

Figure #4

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Figure #5



Figure #6

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
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Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden
Name of Property
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Figure #7



Figure #8



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Figure #9



Figure #10: Google Earth shot of Olcott Park

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National Park Service

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Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden
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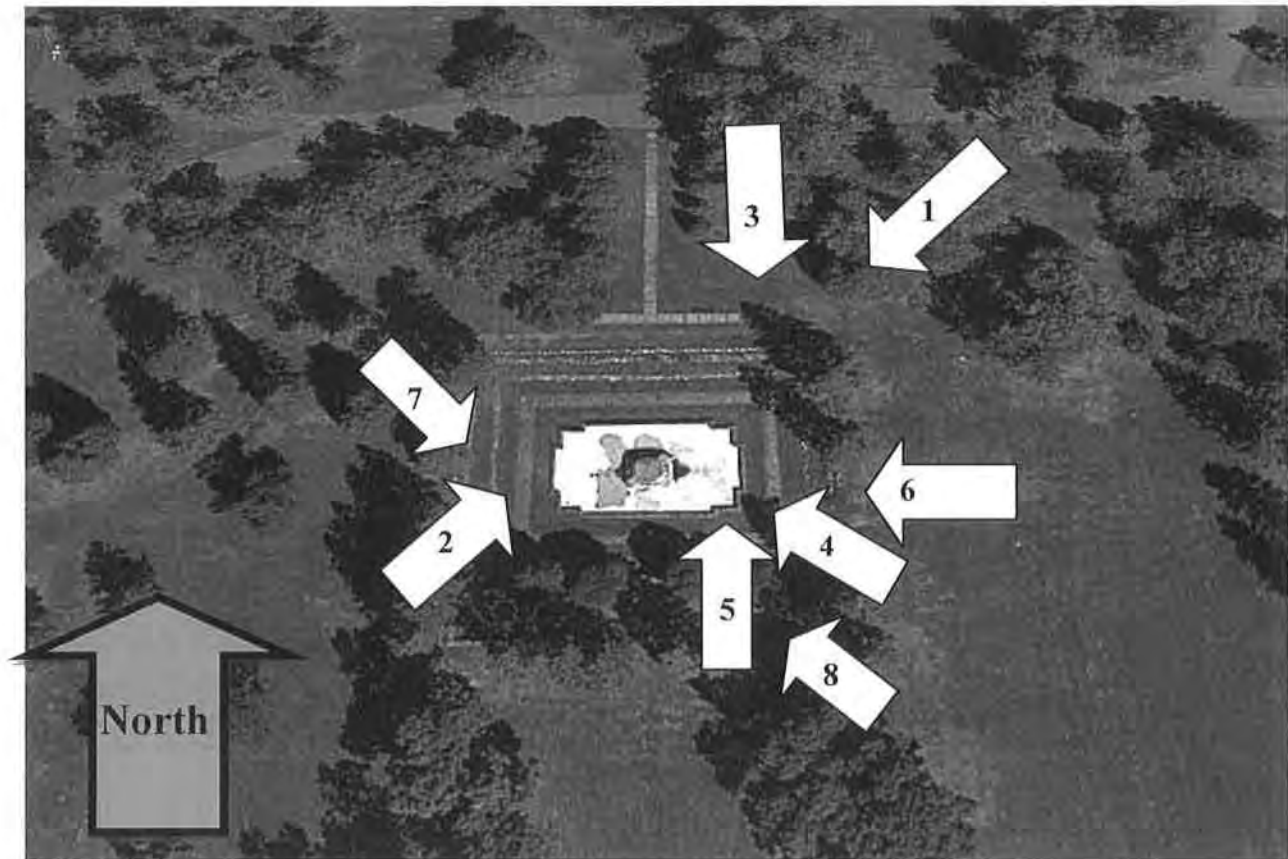


Figure #11: Google Earth shot showing segment of northwest quadrant of Olcott Park with Electric Fountain and Rock Garden in center. Arrows show camera direction of logged photos

**United States Department of the Interior**  
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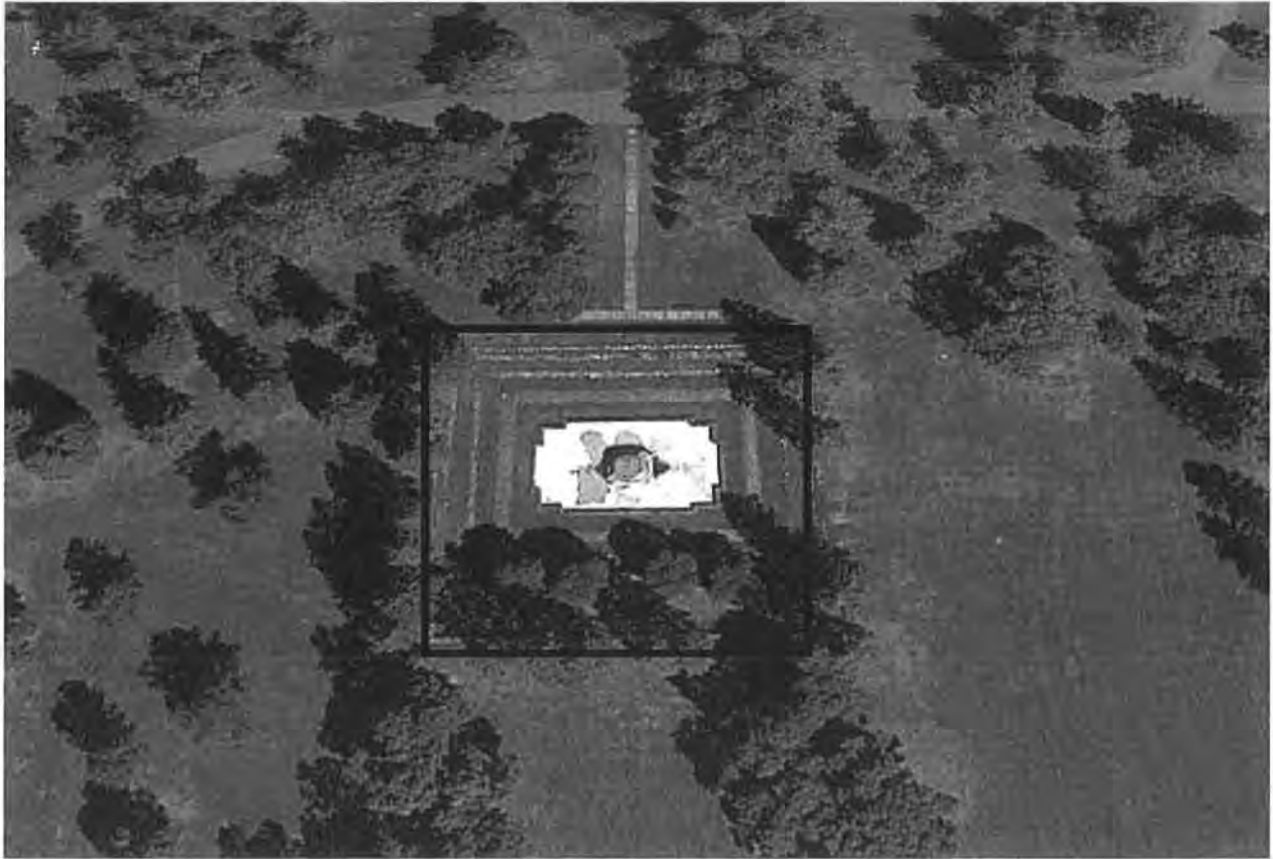


Figure #12: Google Earth shot showing the boundary of the historic resource, described as the approximately 120 x 120 foot square parcel in the northwest quadrant of Olcott Park which is delineated by the line of granite boulders which form the top of the rock garden walls on the east, west, and north sides of the parcel, and by the southerly edge of the granite observation deck along the south side of the parcel.



















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received:  Date of Pending List:  Date of 16th Day:  Date of 45th Day:  Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept  Return  Reject  Date

Abstract/Summary  
Comments:

Recommendation/  
Criteria

Reviewer Roger Reed Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2278 Date

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

Minnesota Historical Society  
State Historic Preservation Office  
345 Kellogg Blvd West, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102  
651-259-3451



**TO:** Stephanie Toothman, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places

**FROM:** Ginny Way

**DATE:** 4/17/2017

**NAME OF PROPERTY:** Olcott Park Electric Fountain and Rock Garden

**COUNTY AND STATE:** St. Louis County, Minnesota

**SUBJECT:** National Register:

- Nomination
- Multiple Property Documentation Form
- Request for determination of eligibility
- Request for removal (Reference No.        )
- Nomination resubmission
- Boundary increase/decrease (Reference No.        )
- Additional documentation (Reference No.        )

**DOCUMENTATION:**

- Original National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- Multiple Property Documentation Form
- Continuation Sheets
- Removal Documentation
- Photographs
- CD w/ image files
- Original USGS Map
- Sketch map(s)
- Correspondence
  - Owner Objection
    - The enclosed owner objections
    - Do  Do not  constitute a majority of property owners

**STAFF COMMENTS:**

**Memorandum**

**Date:** June 14, 2017

**Re:** Olcott Park Fountain and Rock Garden, nomination text clarification

---

Roger,

The enclosed nomination includes text addressing the boundary clarification we discussed on 5/31/17. The applicant was asked to address the following:

- clarify that the 1935 landscape plan (figure #2) was not executed as designed
- confirm that the trees visible in the 1940 post card (figure #6) were not planted by the CCC even though they were included in the original, largely unexecuted plan
- include a map showing current boundaries.

Changes can be found in Section 8 page 19 and additional information pages 1 and 9.

If you have any additional questions or concerns please let me know.

Best,



Ginny

Enclosure: Olcott Park Fountain and Rock Garden nomination