

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

\_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

### SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

**NRIS Reference Number:** 08000466

**Date Listed:** 5-30-08

**Property Name:** Detroit Lakes City Park

**County:** Becker County

**State:** MN

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusion, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrus  
Signature of Keeper

6/18/2008  
Date of Action

#### **Amended Items in Nomination**

##### Section 5: Classification

The following are corrections to the Detroit Lakes City Park nomination:

- The gateposts are non-contributing, because they have been moved to a location that is not compatible with their intended use, which was to mark and light the entrance to the park. Their placement in an area that is not a path or road constitutes a loss of setting.
- The Number of Resources in Section 5, based on the comment above, is revised to two contributing and one non-contributing object for a total of 9 contributing resources and eight non-contributing resources.

##### Section 7: Description

The nomination only includes the portion of the park that existed during the Period of Significance. To clarify the extent of the nominated property, on page 7-4 the first paragraph should conclude with the following sentence:

Any portion of the beach added after the end date of the Period of Significance (1957) is not included in this nomination.

#### **Notification and Distribution**

The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

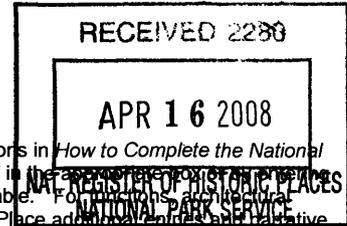
This notice was distributed to the following:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority, without nomination attachment

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**



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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box. For additional information on classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries on separate items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Detroit Lakes City Park

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

Street & number Washington Avenue and North Shore Drive not for publication N/A

city or town Detroit Lakes vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county Becker code 005 zip code 56502

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets        does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant        nationally        statewide X locally. (        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Sue Bloomberg 4/3/08  
Signature of certifying official/Title Sue Bloomberg, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

**Minnesota Historical Society**

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property        meets        does not meet the National Register criteria. (        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
       See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.  
       See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Patrick Anders

5/30/2008

Detroit Lakes City Park  
Name of Property

Becker County, Minnesota  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	5	buildings
2		sites
3	2	structures
3		objects
10	7	Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/Park  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/Park  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

No style  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Stone  
Stucco  
roof Asphalt  
other  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.)

X 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.)

Property is: N/A

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed on the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
X Other

Name of repository:

Becker County Historical Society, Detroit Lakes, MN

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1897-1957

Significant Dates

1897, 1915, 1928, 1937, 1948

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Randolph, A. S. (builder, 1915 pavilion)

Works Progress Administration (builder, 1935-1937)

Wisted, T. A., and Sons (builder, 1956 bathhouse)

Detroit Lakes City Park  
Name of Property

Becker County, Minnesota  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** approx. 39 acres

Detroit Lakes, Minn.  
1959, Photorevised 1982

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	15	282910	5187649
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	15	282860	5187304

3	15	283279	5187081
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	15	283362	5187075
	<u>X</u> See continuation sheet		

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger, Scott Kelly, and Liz Morrison

organization Gemini Research date August 15, 2007

street & number 15 E. 9th Street telephone 320-589-3846

city or town Morris state MN zip code 56267

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it contains a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C. St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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National Park Service

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Detroit Lakes City Park  
Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

### 7. DESCRIPTION

Detroit Lakes City Park, established in 1897 and improved in 1935-1937, is located in Detroit Lakes, a city of 7,900 in central Minnesota's Becker County. The park is located on the northern shore of Detroit Lake, a beautiful 90'-deep, 3,000-acre lake that has been popular for Euro-American fishing, swimming, and boating since the late 19th century. The park is about four blocks south of the downtown business district and about eight blocks south of the former Northern Pacific Railroad tracks (now Burlington Northern-Santa Fe).

Detroit Lakes City Park stands in a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood. West of the park along Washington Avenue are small businesses, a resort, apartment buildings, and early-to-mid 20th century houses. North of the park is a modern medical clinic and a residential neighborhood developed in the 1940s through 1960s. East of the park is the Detroit Lakes high school campus. Immediately southeast of the park is a former resort called Edgewater Beach Cottages (built 1937-1939, listed on the National Register in 1989), as well as several lakeshore homes dating from the 1920s through the 1990s.

Detroit Lake narrows southeast of City Park. The projecting shoreline divides the lake into two parts known historically as Little Detroit Lake, on the west, and Big Detroit Lake, on the east. Some historic and modern sources refer to the lake near Detroit Lakes City Park as Detroit Lake and others use the name Little Detroit Lake.

### Description of Principal Resources

Detroit Lakes City Park's principal resources are listed in a table at the end of Section 7. Each principal resource is described below. See the accompanying map entitled "Sketch Map, Detroit Lakes City Park, Becker Co., MN."

The first resource described below is the park itself, categorized as a Site for the purposes of this nomination.

#### Detroit Lakes City Park

Built: 1897, improved 1935-1937

Builder: Unknown, Works Progress Administration (1935-1937 improvements)

Resource Count: One Contributing Site

Detroit Lakes City Park is an area of about 39 acres, which includes Washington Ballpark, a baseball field and stadium in the park's northwestern corner. Since its establishment in 1897, the 1920s wooden grandstand (replaced in 1948) and a 1955 bandshell (replaced in 2006) have been removed. Five simple picnic shelters (circa 1970s) and a park department maintenance building (circa 1990) have been added after the period of significance (1897-1957).

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Detroit Lakes City Park  
Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

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Detroit Lakes City Park's natural assets include about 650' of shoreline on Detroit Lake, and a broad, forested hill that rises in the eastern half of the park.

The western half of the park is basically flat. Washington Ballpark in the northwestern corner was originally quite swampy and was filled and contoured in 1915 and again in 1935. Closest to the swimming beach and to Washington Avenue, the western half of the park is more highly-developed for recreational use. The northern part of this area contains the baseball park, tennis courts, recreation building, playground, and other athletic fields. The central part is a picnic area with parking and a bandshell. The southern part contains the swimming beach, bathhouse, and dance pavilion. Historically, there was a public campground located somewhere near the center of the park, perhaps near the site of the current bandshell.

The eastern half of the park is comparatively unimproved, with the landscape dominated by mature deciduous trees and mowed turf grass. This area is large enough that a visitor walking to the center can become immersed in the forest. A broad, wooded hill features a cluster of four concrete picnic fireplaces near the top. The northwestern slope of the hill is a popular winter sledding spot, with sleds descending toward the intersection of North Shore Drive and Lyndale Avenue. Widely scattered beneath the trees in the eastern half of the park are unobtrusive modern wood and metal exercise "stations," as well as "frisbee" golf "holes" consisting of metal poles supporting chain baskets. Most traces of historic dirt footpaths in this area have disappeared.

Some of the recreation areas in the western half of the park are lighted by lamps mounted on widely-scattered circa 1940s utility poles, plus a few miscellaneous modern lamps. The eastern half of the park is largely unlit.

### *Circulation*

North Shore Drive runs east and west through the Detroit Lakes City Park. The park's automobile parking area (described below) is entered from this street. A 1939 aerial photograph indicates that North Shore Drive's alignment has changed very little since that time, although it was widened from about 40' to about 46', sometime after 1939. (In addition, the intersection of North Shore Drive and Roosevelt Avenue was Y-shaped in 1939 and is now T-shaped.) Within the park, North Shore Drive and Roosevelt Avenue are lined with widely-spaced Colonial Revival-style street lamps that date from circa 1960. (They match the lamps in the parking area.) The east side of Washington Avenue has approximately four circa 1980 street lamps with tall standards. There is a pair of simple metal flagpoles flanking North Shore Drive in front of the recreation building. They have at-grade concrete bases.

Detroit Lakes City Park has two other internal roads. One is Park Lake Boulevard, a short street that begins at North Shore Drive and ends at the southern boundary of the park (where a private drive begins). Park Lake Boulevard is a remnant of an early shoreline road that once intersected

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Detroit Lakes City Park  
Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

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with Washington Avenue north of the pavilion. The western arm of City Park's parking area shares an alignment with Park Lake Boulevard. The final road within the park is a short, narrow, alley-like gravel road near the park's southeastern corner. It links Roosevelt Avenue with a private drive. It is the only street in or around the park that has not been paved with bituminous and edged with curb and gutter.

The park is served by several streets around its perimeter – Washington Avenue and Roosevelt Avenue, which are fairly busy, and Langford Street, Lincoln Avenue, Lyndale Avenue, and Parkview Street, which are less traveled. Washington Avenue is Detroit Lakes' historic "main street" and the principal route between downtown and the lake. The Washington Avenue sidewalk along the park, originally a boardwalk, has been in place since about the 1880s and is now poured concrete. Langford Street, Lyndale Avenue, and Parkview Street near the park were not built until after 1939 (probably circa 1950).

### *Vegetation*

Detroit Lakes City Park has no planting areas, gardens, or monuments that are formalized or symmetrical in design, but was instead developed with a more naturalistic aesthetic intent. Most of the park is dominated by closely-spaced native deciduous trees with mowed turf grass beneath them. There are fewer trees in the recreational areas north of Lake Shore Drive. Many of the trees were present when the park was established so that the park echoes the composition of woodlands elsewhere around the lake. Mature trees include oak (e.g., bur oak or *Quercus macrocarpa*), American linden (*Tilia americana*, both single- and multi-trunked), and green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) in about equal numbers, with fewer American elm (*Ulmus americana*) and paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*). As the park was developed, its caretakers evidently cleared the existing forest of dead and damaged trees, as well as understory shrubs and herbaceous plants, and then planted a ground cover of turf grass. The result is a comfortable, sheltering, shady environment that is inviting to walk through. Several additional deciduous trees have been planted in the park since 1960, most in the western half. They include maples (*Acer* spp.), green ash, and crabapples (*Malus* spp.). Many were likely planted to replace American elms lost to Dutch Elm Disease.

The park has a stand of mature pines (*Pinus* spp.) at the swimming beach, possibly planted in 1937. Elsewhere there are a few other pre-1960 pines and spruce (*Picea* spp.), as well as a few pines and spruce planted in the 1970s and 1980s.

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Detroit Lakes City Park  
Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

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### Swimming Beach

Built: 1897

Builder: Unknown, Works Progress Administration (1937 improvements), City of Detroit Lakes (1965 improvements)

Resource Count: One Contributing Site

The swimming beach is one of the most popular features of the park. The beach was probably in existence when the park was created in 1897. It was improved by the WPA in 1937 and again by the City of Detroit Lakes in 1965. Historically, the shore at the foot of Washington Avenue (southwest of the park) was the site of boat and fishing docks, bait and snack shops, a large wooden water slide, diving towers, and other structures, most of which were privately owned. After a 1965 improvement project, the public beach extended a continuous 3,800' from City Park westward around the northern shore of the lake.

Within Detroit Lakes City Park the beach is about 560' long. It is 75' wide at its widest and narrows to about 30' at its eastern end. The bathhouse and pavilion are adjacent to the beach. Also nearby is a steel swing set that likely dates from 1937, a steel bike rack, and a modern set of timber and steel playground equipment. The beach also has four circa 1965 concrete picnic tables. They were built to replace portable wooden picnic tables installed by the WPA in 1937. Sand was added to the beach in a clean-up project that began in 1965. Two or three unobtrusive modern street lamps were added to the beach about this time. During cold weather, the beach equipment, including a swimming dock, raft, and water slide, is stored outdoors near the bathhouse.

### Pavilion

Built: 1915

Architect: Unknown (1915), Lightowler Johnson Associates of Fargo (2006 alterations)

Builder: A. S. Randolph (1915), AAA Construction of Detroit Lakes (2006 alterations)

Resource Count: One Noncontributing Building

The pavilion is located on the eastern side of Washington Avenue at the southern end of the park. The 80' x 130' building is aligned with the adjacent shoreline. The pavilion's main entrance faces Washington Avenue to the west. The current 1915 pavilion is a replacement (or substantial reconstruction) of the first pavilion, a 36' x 60' pavilion built in 1897, the year the park was created. In addition to housing dances, concerts, and other large gatherings, the pavilion has generally contained a concession stand open in the summer to serve the swimming beach. The pavilion has a hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles. A clerestory level provides light to the interior dance floor. Historic photos indicate much of the first story was covered with stucco and lighted by large windows and doors with screens and multi-paned sash. The clerestory level was evidently first covered with stucco and later with clapboard. Historically there were four or five flagpoles mounted on the roof.

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Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

Today most of the ground level is surfaced with stucco and the clerestory level is sided with vinyl siding designed to simulate clapboard. The interior of the pavilion is simply arranged and decorated. It is dominated by a large rectangular dancing area whose wooden floor was replaced in 2006. The dance floor has a tall open ceiling with large modern metal roof trusses exposed. At the eastern end of the dance floor is a wooden stage that was rebuilt in 2006. Surrounding the northern, western, and southern sides of the dance floor are concrete-floored corridors that are separated from the dance floor by partial walls that are solid for the lower 3' and then open above with simple square posts at regular intervals to support the roof. The corridors have simple wooden ceilings with exposed timber beams. Still in use, the landmark pavilion has served Detroit Lakes for more than 90 years. It was extensively renovated in 2006 in a \$750,000 project funded in part by a \$283,000 grant from the State of Minnesota. Exterior changes included altering the eastern roofline, surfacing the exterior with new stucco and vinyl siding, replacing doors, and reducing windows in size and number and fitting them with new sliding sash. Interior changes included replacing the dance floor, trusses, and ceiling, rebuilding the stage, and renovating the restrooms. A grand reopening of the pavilion in June 2006 featured a show band, the Casablanca Orchestra, which performed songs from the pavilion's 90-year past ("Detroit Lakes Pavilion" 2006).

### Washington Ballpark

Built: Circa 1907-1908, grandstand 1920s (razed), field rebuilt 1935, grandstand 1948

Architect: City Engineer (1948 improvements)

Builder: Works Progress Administration (1935 field), Pittsburgh Steel of Des Moines (1948 grandstand), Westinghouse Supply of Fargo (1948 lights), City of Detroit Lakes (1948 grandstand and lights)

Resource Count: One Contributing Structure

Washington Ballpark is located in the northwestern corner of Detroit Lakes City Park, at the southeastern corner of Washington Avenue and Langford Street. It comprises about eight acres and has changed little since 1948. It is uncertain when this ball diamond was developed (baseball has probably been placed somewhere in the park since 1897), but the diamond was on this site by 1908 when bleachers were built. The ball field was rebuilt in 1915 when the city used large quantities of sand to stabilize the wet soil. A fence was added in 1929. The field was rebuilt again by the WPA in 1935. A wooden grandstand at the northwestern corner of the diamond replaced bleachers in the 1920s. The wooden grandstand was replaced by the current steel, concrete, and wood grandstand in 1948.

The 1920s grandstand was a simple rectangular wooden structure with a shed roof supported by square posts. The 1948 grandstand is tripartite. It has an intact, tiered, welded steel superstructure made by Pittsburgh Steel of Des Moines, Iowa, that is supported by a poured concrete base. The tiers support rows of simple spectator benches made of 2" x 6" planks. (Two timbers form the seat, one forms the back.) The benches seat 1,200 fans. Chain-link safety fencing lines the side and back edges of the seating. At the upper edge of the grandstand is a woodframe press box whose unaltered interior displays simple wooden walls, floors, ceiling, and

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broadcasting counter. At the lower edge of the grandstand is a simple pipe railing. Wire poultry netting stretches from floor to ceiling to protect spectators from stray balls. The grandstand roof is supported by steel I-beams. The roof has been repaired recently with new sheet metal. The main entrance to the grandstand is located in the canted northwestern corner, and fans walk into the structure (under the tiered seating) to reach their seats. Beneath the seating are a locker room, two restrooms, concession stand, and ticket booth, all constructed in 1949, the summer after the grandstand was built. The grandstand retains integrity from 1948-1949 except that the exterior walls have been resided recently with vertical tongue-and-groove wood. The original green-painted shiplap siding remains in place beneath the newer wood. The historic entrance door at the northwestern corner (probably a large wooden sliding door) has been replaced recently by a roll-up garage door.

The ballpark is surrounded by a chain-link fence, built in 1947 (Sachs 1948). The field is lighted by approximately eight floodlights mounted on tall, four-legged steel towers installed in 1948 by Westinghouse Supply of Fargo and the City of Detroit Lakes. Two team dugouts flank the grandstand. They are small, woodframe, shed-roofed structures with concrete floors. They appear to retain their 1948 size, location, and general appearance. They were originally open (posts supported the roof) and are now sided with plywood on the back and sides. At the southern edge of the field is a modern electronic scoreboard.

Washington Ballpark is currently home field for the Detroit Lakes Angels (of the Minnesota Amateur Baseball League's Hi-10 Conference), American Legion baseball, Little League baseball, and the Detroit Lakes High School varsity baseball team.

### Tennis Courts

Built: 1935-1937

Builder: Works Progress Administration

Resource Count: One Contributing Structure

The tennis courts, built in 1935-1937, are located east of the recreation building on the northern side of North Shore Drive. They measure about 120' x 200'. An historic aerial photo confirms the courts were the same size in 1939. The courts are surrounded by a tall chain-link fence, dating from circa 1937, that has square steel posts topped with simple finials. The courts have been resurfaced recently but are otherwise intact.

### Recreation Building

Built: 1937

Builder: Works Progress Administration

Resource Count: One Contributing Building

The recreation building, built in the National Park Service Rustic Style, is one of the major buildings built by the Works Progress Administration during the 1935-1937 improvement of City Park. It is located near the center of the park on the northern side of North Shore Drive, west of

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Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

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the tennis courts. The one-story, 34' x 43' building is constructed of randomly-laid granite boulders, many of which have been split. (The stonework matches that of the stone gatepost set.) In the southeastern corner, within the massing of the roofline, is a porch area that originally had an open pergola-like ceiling. The pergola was later replaced by a solid wood ceiling, but the porch area retains its open walls, concrete floor and stout stone corner post. The recreation building has a flat roof with a poured concrete coping that was originally painted white and is now covered with white-painted metal. Windows and doors are deeply recessed in the thick stone walls. The window openings were originally filled with multipaned casement windows with multipaned transoms, and are now blocked with wood. (The original windows are likely still in place behind the wood coverings.) Historic photos show two long, low, backless wooden benches in front of the building, as well as four iron and wood park benches (of a more traditional design) standing nearby. Today there is at least one steel bike rack (circa 1960) near the building.

### Playground

Built: 1937

Builder: Works Progress Administration

Resource Count: One Noncontributing Structure

The playground is located west of the recreation building. The oldest playground equipment dates from 1937 and includes a steel swing set, a slide, and an arched monkey bar set. Immediately west of this original equipment is a large, plastic, brightly-colored set of play equipment that dates from circa 1990 and visually dominates the space. Nearby is a circa 1990 sandbox (about 10' x 12') covered by a wooden gabled roof. A modern chain-link fence now runs along the south edge of the playground, separating the playground from the traffic of North Shore Drive.

### Stone Gatepost Set

Built: 1937

Builder: Works Progress Administration

Resource Count: One Contributing Object

The gatepost set originally stood on North Shore Drive at its intersection with Washington Avenue, announcing the major entrance to the park. The gatepost set was moved at an unknown date about 200' to the southeast where it now stands in the grassy lawn south of North Shore Drive. (The move may have occurred after World War II when North Shore Drive was widened by about 6' to its current width.) Each gatepost or pier is made of randomly-laid granite boulders. The stonework matches that of the recreation building. Each pier has a 5' x 5' footprint and is about 7' tall with a battered or tapered profile. Each originally supported a spherical white lamp. The lamps were removed at an unknown date and today each pier is topped by a thin protective coat of poured concrete. When the gatepost set was moved to its current location, the footings were apparently poorly built (or omitted) because the piers have tilted due to frost heave.

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Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota

### Picnic Fireplace Clusters

Built: 1937  
Builder: Works Progress Administration  
Resource Count: Two Contributing Objects

The park has two clusters of low, octagonal, poured concrete picnic fireplaces. (Each cluster is counted as a contributing object in this nomination.) One cluster of four fireplaces is located on top of the park's high wooded hill (approximately south of the intersection of North Shore Drive and Lyndale Avenue). The other group of five fireplaces is located immediately east of the eastern arm of the parking area. Each fireplace appears to be generally intact, although a few of the fireplaces are missing. Each octagonal unit is about 4' in diameter and rests on a simple at-grade concrete pad. Each has a heavy metal cooking grate across the top. Most of the grates are round.

### Parking Area

Built: 1937  
Builder: Works Progress Administration  
Resource Count: One Noncontributing Structure

Detroit Lakes City Park has one parking area. It was built in 1937 by the WPA and is located east of Washington Avenue and south of North Shore Drive. The parking area is entered from North Shore Drive. The parking area has a U-shaped configuration (of about 1,000 linear feet). The western arm of the "U" is also part of Park Lake Boulevard. Each arm of the "U" was originally 25' wide, which accommodated driving and parallel parking, and is now 60' wide, which accommodates driving and angled parking. A short branch of extra parking extends west from the western branch of the "U" toward Washington Avenue. This part of the parking area was built on the historic alignment of an early shoreline road that intersected with Washington Avenue north of the pavilion. This western branch of parking was about 150' x 60' in 1939 and now measures about 150' x 70'. City Park's parking area was originally edged with concrete curbing, and is edged with concrete curbing today. Both the parking area and North Shore Drive are lined with widely-spaced circa 1930s street lamps. Near the parking area are three rectangular wooden benches and three small flower beds (circa 1930s).

### Recreation Fields and Courts

Built: Circa 1937-1970s  
Builder: Unknown  
Resource Count: One Contributing Object

According to the *Detroit Lakes Record*, the WPA built courts for horseshoes, badminton, softball, croquet, shuffleboard, and other sports in the park in 1937 ("Work May" 1937). A 1939 aerial photo shows that these facilities were located near the tennis courts. Today this area

PS 1937  
- (concrete tennis courts - see above)

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contains a small basketball court that measures 85' x 50' and has a concrete surface and two modern backstops. Nearby is a slightly smaller rectangular concrete game court of unknown purpose. Farther north, toward the intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Langford Street, is a softball field that postdates 1939 and may have been built in the 1940s or 1950s. It has a small set of recent portable aluminum bleachers at home plate, which is in the southwestern corner of the field. A pair of soccer nets (circa 1990) has been installed in the softball field so that the field can also be used as a north-south-aligned soccer field.

### Bathhouse

Built: 1956

Builder: T. A. Wisted and Sons

Resource Count: One Contributing Building

The bathhouse is located adjacent to the swimming beach, east of the pavilion. It is a simple, one-story, 40' x 60', concrete block building painted white. It has a flat roof with the ends of the wooden rafters visible at the eaves. A band of green fiberglass encircles the building at the top of the walls (just below the eaves) to allow light to enter the changing rooms and restrooms. Most of the doors are single-leaf, but there is a wider vehicle entrance on the northern facade. There are L-shaped concrete block walls projecting from the northwestern and northeastern corners to screen the entrances to the restrooms. According to the *Detroit Lakes Tribune*, the bathhouse was designed to provide "spacious dressing rooms for bathers, locker facilities, and restrooms." It also has a storage room for equipment. Built for about \$22,500, the bathhouse replaced the park's previous bathhouse, built at the beach in 1937 by the WPA.

### Picnic Shelters

Built: Circa 1970s

Builder: Unknown

Resource Count: Two Noncontributing Buildings

The park has five picnic shelters. A cluster of four shelters, counted together as one noncontributing building, are located fairly close to the south side of North Shore Drive. The other shelter is located near the swimming beach. The shelters were sponsored by local civic organizations and built around the 1970s-1980s. They are nearly identical and measure about 20' x 24'. They have gabled roofs, open sides, and concrete floors. Each roof is supported by about eight square timber posts, reinforced by short angle braces. (Three of the roofs are covered with asphalt shingles and two with sheet metal.) There is a single steel grill box, mounted waist-high on a steel post, at each of the two westernmost shelters. The shelter closest to the western arm of the parking area also has a circa 1960 brick picnic fireplace with a chimney. This fireplace has a footprint of about 3' x 4' and is built of reddish-brown brick.

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### Park Department Maintenance Building

Built: Circa 1990  
Builder: Unknown  
Resource Count: One Noncontributing Building

The park department maintenance building, a fairly recent addition to the park, is located north of the tennis courts on the western side of Lincoln Avenue. It is a one-story building that measures about 70' x 75'. It has an intersecting gabled roof and vinyl siding. There are roll-up garage doors on the eastern facade.

### Bandshell

Built: 2006  
Architect: Lightowler Johnson Associates of Fargo  
Builder: AAA Construction of Detroit Lakes  
Resource Count: One Noncontributing Building

The park bandshell was built in 2006 at a cost of \$88,000 to replace a previous bandshell built in 1955. The bandshell was funded in part by a State of Minnesota grant that also helped renovate the pavilion. The new bandshell is located east of the western arm of the parking area in the approximate location of its predecessor. Designed by Lightowler Johnson Associates, the bandshell has a curving roof (perhaps designed to blend with its hillside setting) supported by three, thick glue-laminate wooden beams that are in turn supported by simple metal posts. The small stagehouse is built of textured gray concrete block. The bandshell was sited so that a grassy slope to the north could function as a natural amphitheater for audience seating.

### Summary of Principal Resources

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>	
Detroit Lakes City Park	1897	One Contrib Site
Swimming Beach	1897	One Contrib Site
Pavilion	1915	One Noncontrib Building
Washington Ballpark	Ca. 1907-1948	One Contrib Structure
Tennis Courts	1935-1937	One Contrib Structure
Recreation Building	1937	One Contrib Building
Playground	1937	One Noncontrib Structure
Stone Gatepost Set	1937	One Contrib Object
Picnic Fireplace Clusters	1937	Two Contrib Objects
Parking Area	1937	One Noncontrib Structure
Recreation Fields and Courts	Ca. 1937-1970s	One Contrib Structure
Bathhouse	1956	One Contrib Building

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Picnic Shelters	Ca. 1970s	Two Noncontrib Buildings
Park Dept. Maintenance Building	Ca. 1990	One Noncontrib Building
Bandshell	2006	One Noncontrib Building

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### 8. NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Detroit Lakes City Park is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, significance to the broad patterns of our history, in the area of Entertainment/Recreation. Established in 1897 and improved in 1935-1937, the park is significant for the prominent role it played in the social history of Detroit Lakes and in the development of the city's summer tourism industry. Detroit Lakes City Park also represents several broad patterns in the typical development of urban parks including the development of beaches and dance pavilions, the rise of the playground and recreation movement, the popularity of baseball, New Deal park development, and renewed investment in urban parks immediately after World War II. The property is significant on a local level, and is associated with the statewide historic context entitled Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945. The period of significance is 1897-1957.

#### Tourism in Detroit Lakes

The community of Detroit Lakes (called simply "Detroit" until 1926) is located in Minnesota's Lake Park Region, a crescent-shaped band of lakes and forests that curves through central Minnesota from Bemidji on the north, down through Detroit Lakes, Alexandria, Glenwood, and Kandiyohi County, and then eastward toward the Twin Cities. The region's natural beauty and recreational resources have supported a robust tourism industry since the late 19th century (Larson 1998: 117). There are more than 400 lakes in Becker County alone.

The first Euro-American settlers arrived in the Detroit Lakes area beginning around 1830, traveling by oxcart on the Woods Trail, which passed around the eastern side of Detroit Lake. The village of Detroit, as it was first called, was founded in 1871 when the Northern Pacific Railroad was built through the area. The town's name comes from the French word "*detroit*," meaning "strait" or "narrow channel." Several land companies enticed settlers to Detroit and by May of 1872 the village had 37 houses, a blacksmith shop, a brick kiln, and several stores. The town plat was filed in July, 1872, and a village government was organized in 1881. By 1885, when tourism was beginning to be important, Detroit had a population of 554. Five years later, the city had tripled in size to 1,510. The population climbed to 2,060 in 1900; 2,807 in 1910; and 3,426 in 1920. In 1926 the town changed its name to "Detroit Lakes," ending decades of post office mix-ups with Detroit, Michigan.

Detroit Lakes' economic base was initially lumbering, but almost from the beginning tourism was a significant part of the economy. The town is located on a chain of eight interconnected lakes extending 40 miles from north to south. According to historian Paul Clifford Larson, Detroit Lakes was the first town in the Lake Park Region to develop a large summer community. "Trainloads of tourists camped, cottaged, and stayed at resorts on lakes in this grand, wild parkland for a full generation before the arrival of the automobile," he writes (Larson 1998: 118-119). Detroit Lakes attracted visitors from considerable distances. For example, one of

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Minnesota's first private interstate recreational clubs, the Detroit Lake, St. Louis, St. Paul, and Minneapolis Fishing and Shooting Club, was formed at Detroit Lakes in 1879. Nicknamed the St. Louis Club, the group built a cluster of cottages and a clubhouse on the eastern shore of Detroit Lake.

Hotels, resorts, summer cottages, campgrounds, and other tourist amenities sprouted along the county's lakes, and many small businesses catered to visitors. By the mid-1880s, the *Detroit Record* was actively promoting the city's attractions for "the pleasure seeker, the sportsman or the invalid. There are deer, moose, bear, ducks, geese, prairie chickens, partridges, etc. for the hunter; all varieties of fish for the angler; a pure health-giving atmosphere and mineral springs for the invalid, excellent routes for canoe voyages, and beautiful lakes and good boats for sailing enthusiasts" (Teague and Prentice 1971). A set of mineral springs contained lithia, an oxide of lithium, which was purported to be good for your health.

The northern shore of Detroit Lake, closest to downtown, was platted in cottage lots. By 1886 the village council had built three wide avenues between downtown and the lakeshore, one of which was Washington Avenue. A board sidewalk was installed down the eastern side of Washington to the shore (Teague and Prentice 1971: 25; Larson 1998: 119).

A 1913 tourism brochure published by the Detroit Commercial Club extolled the region's amenities, including beaches of "fine white sand, unusually free from weeds and water plants," and plenty of fish and game birds (Detroit Commercial Club 1913: 10). Early photographs show tourists laden with heavy strings of fish and scores of birds (KDLM 2002).

Railroads helped promote Detroit Lakes' budding tourism industry. In 1894, for example, the Northern Pacific reduced its passenger fares to Detroit Lakes from Fargo, North Dakota, a much larger city 45 miles west. The promotion was a success and many tourists regularly took the train to Detroit Lakes on Saturday night, returning to Fargo on Monday morning (Koop "Northern" 1987). Eventually Detroit Lakes was served by 14 passenger trains daily. Trains brought visitors from Fargo, Minneapolis, Canada, and elsewhere and deposited them at one of the city's two depots where they were often met by wagons and buses. Many visitors then transferred to steam and paddle boats that brought them to hotels and cabins in areas not yet reached by decent roads.

From 1889 to 1919, before the widespread use of automobiles, several steamboats plied the chain of lakes ferrying tourists from Detroit Lake south through Lake Sally and Lake Amelia, to Pelican Lake. A steamboat landing was located at the foot of Washington Avenue, just west of Detroit Lakes City Park. During the summers, a paddle-wheel steamboat made three trips daily to and from the cottage settlements on the southern lakes in the chain. This had been made possible by a remarkable waterway engineering feat, created by local entrepreneur John K. West who in 1888 carved a system of channels and dams to open the lower four lakes to boat traffic. (A fellow investor was local newspaper editor George D. Hamilton.) The dredged waterway "was an extraordinary enterprise for its day," writes Larson, especially because "its sole commercial purpose was summer tourism" (Larson 1998: 120).

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The steamboats also offered pleasure excursions. The 70'-long, log-burning *Minnie Corliss*, for example, ran moonlight cruises with dancing on the upper deck to the music of the Lakeside Band. There were also boat rental concessions at the foot of Washington Avenue west of Detroit Lakes City Park and at the Hotel Minnesota Boathouse nearby (Teague and Prentice 1971: 25).

Detroit Lakes' resort hotel tradition began in earnest about 1884 when local developer Elon G. Holmes and fellow investors built a large luxury hotel, the Hotel Minnesota, on Washington Avenue at the southern edge of downtown. A four-story, wooden building, the hotel rivaled elegant resort hotels at Lake Minnetonka and elsewhere in Minnesota. John K. West was manager. (In 1903 Holmes and West tried to build a Hotel Minnesota Annex adjacent to the city beach, but the venture failed.) Another early resort hotel was August Guethling's Lakeside Hotel, built at the foot of Lake Avenue, one block west of present-day City Park. "Visitors came from miles around to enjoy the lake and the beauty of the area and to swim, fish and hunt," according to a biography of Guethling (Lake Park 1976: 44). Guethling financed and built Detroit Lake's first bandstand (located on the southern edge of downtown) and was a member of the Lakeside Band (Lake Park 1976: 44).

Just west of Guethling's Lakeside Hotel was the Park Hotel, owned by the Weiss Family. Fred Weiss then bought the Lakeside Hotel in 1928, changed the name to the Lakeside Lodge, and built one of the first sets of tourist cabins on the northern shore of the lake (Lake Park 1976: 44-45; Koutsky and Koutsky 2006: 51). For 36 years, Weiss also operated a dock, boat rental service, concession stand, and bathhouse at the foot of Washington Avenue, adjacent to the City Park beach. "The public enjoyed all the water equipment furnished by Fred," according to a biography. "This included a large toboggan slide, tilt-a-whirl, raft, teeter-totter, small children[s] slide, logs, trapeze, and diving tower" (Lake Park 1976: 44-45). Early photographs show the impressive "Chutes" water slide, with its intricate scaffolding, standing next to the City Park beach (KDLM 2002: 127-128).

Other early tourist attractions included a popular lakeshore drive. The road was five miles long, and, during some years, sightseers could even cross the lake on a sandbar, which "barely came to the surface and provided a delightful drive across the lake" (Teague and Prentice 1971: 25).

In 1935 one of Detroit Lakes' most important summer events, the annual Northwest Water Carnival, was established. (The carnival is described below.)

Detroit Lakes' population topped 5,000 in 1940, and remained steady through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In the summers, however, the city often swelled to 30,000 people. By 1948 an estimated 50,000 summer tourists were visiting Detroit Lake. Tourism began extending into the winter months in the early 1960s as ice fishing, snowmobiling, and skiing increased (McEwen 1999).

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### History and Development of Detroit Lakes City Park

Detroit Lakes City Park was established in 1897 at the foot of Washington Avenue, on the northern shore of Detroit Lake. Originally, the park was about 12 acres and offered simple amenities such as grassy lawns, shady picnic areas, a swimming beach, a simple baseball diamond, and a lakefront dance pavilion. Today, the park is about 39 acres. Development of the park occurred in stages, over many decades. In the early years, much of the activity was privately financed.

The history of Detroit Lakes City Park reflects, on a small scale, many of the same public needs and values that shaped urban parks across America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: land stewardship, economic development, appreciation of scenic beauty, the rise of tourism, civic pride and community boosterism, and interest in health, sports, and recreation. From its founding, the park was a valued community asset, vital to bringing visitors to town, which in turn stimulated local business. As Detroit Lakes' premier park, it was the central location for townspeople and visitors to enjoy summer recreation and social events including concerts and dancing, organized sports and water recreation, club and social activities, and community celebrations. For more than 100 years, local citizens have rallied around City Park; foresighted early leaders preserved the park site from private development, and later generations worked to improve and furnish it.

Detroit Lakes City Park was established in 1897 when the community's population was about 2,000. The impetus for creating the lakeside park came from local businessmen, some of whom were members of the Detroit Lakes chapter of Modern Woodmen of America, a fraternal society. These businessmen, like their counterparts in many American cities, evidently argued that an attractive city park would increase property values, encourage commerce, and boost the community's appeal. As the mayor of Cincinnati remarked in 1872, "a city of any pretensions cannot do without parks" (Kornbluh 1993: 55).

By the late 19th century the area fronting Washington Avenue and the northern shore of Detroit Lake (the western part of the present-day park) was already being used for recreation and social gatherings but was privately owned. This wooded lakeshore area was apparently known as the Detroit Lake Pleasure Grounds or the Chautauqua Grounds. To improve access to the lakeshore and this site, the village council in 1885 had authorized a "good plank sidewalk" along the eastern side of Washington Avenue "from the north end of the village to the water's edge" (Teague and Prentice 1971: 25). The traveling Chautauqua show, an annual summer staple in Detroit Lakes, set up its big tent nearby. In 1895, the Becker County Old Settlers Association held its annual meeting there. An 1895 photo shows the large group assembled on the grass near the foot of Washington Avenue beneath a canopy of mature trees (KDLM 2002: 93).

On May 5, 1897, Detroit's Modern Woodmen asked the village council to purchase lakefront property for a public park. Two weeks later, on May 19, the council received a petition signed by nearly 100 citizens, proposing that a tract of lakeshore land be acquired. A minority of the petitioners were in favor of a site a few blocks west of Washington Avenue, while more than 80

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percent favored "the grounds east of Washington Avenue." To encourage the reticent council to act, two local businessmen, physician John B. Carman and newspaper editor George D. Hamilton, appeared at the same council meeting and proposed buying 12 acres immediately east of Washington Avenue and leasing it to the village for a park. This parcel, some of which had already been platted for cottage lots, was owned by the Detroit Light and Land Company, whose president was hotel owner Elon G. Holmes. The parcel was bounded by Washington Avenue on the west, present-day Langford Street on the north, the lake on the south, and the approximate western edge of the current tennis courts on the east. The parcel excluded a rectangle of land at the foot of Washington, owned by John K. West, where the pavilion now stands. Carman and Hamilton purchased the tract for \$1,750 and agreed to lease it to the village for ten years at \$122.50 per year, plus taxes. They also agreed to sell the land to the village at any time during the ten-year lease period for the original purchase price ("Public Parks" ca. 1930).

The council accepted the park deal on May 21, 1897. The lease agreement allowed the village to "make such improvements thereon as it may deem advisable to make [the] said premises a public park or picnic ground, [including] removing underbrush and trees, laying out walks, drives, and streams and ponds, erecting tables, stands, swings, buildings, bridges, wharves, boat and bath houses." Signing for the village council were president William J. Bettinger and recorder Elon G. Holmes. "By this arrangement," wrote the *Detroit Record*, "the village secures the use of one of the finest pieces of lake front property, for the next ten years at nominal cost . . . and the council has acted wisely in taking this action while there are still suitable grounds to be had, as the sale of a few lots would have rendered the grounds unfit for park purposes." But the *Record* couldn't resist scolding the city fathers: "It is a matter that should have received attention years ago" ("Park Grounds Secured" 1897).

Management and development of the park was directed by a three-member park committee (which later became the Park Board) appointed by the council in May 1897. The first directors were Elon G. Holmes, a developer, former state senator, and hotel owner; Everett W. Davis, a merchant and longtime park advocate; and businessman Charles H. Whipple.

Detroit Lakes City Park was the community's first major park. The village apparently had an earlier park, a lot or parcel that the village turned back to its owner (a city founder named George Johnston) in 1883 for an unknown reason. The Northern Pacific Railroad also maintained a small park (about 50' x 300') adjacent to their depot. From circa 1921-1945 there was also a small public bandstand on the former Hotel Minnesota site, a corner lot on the southern edge of downtown. A city-owned campground, eventually known as the American Legion Campgrounds, opened in the 1920s several blocks west of the park. At first these campgrounds evidently supplemented City Park's campsites, but eventually all camping was moved to the Legion Campgrounds.

On May 31, 1897, the village council authorized construction of the park's first building, a 36' x 60' dance pavilion. This may have been located northeast or east of the current pavilion. W. E. Reid and Company won the bid to furnish \$305 worth of lumber for the project, and the building was painted the following spring ("Public Parks" ca. 1930).

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The park quickly became a tourist destination popular for picnics, boating, fishing, swimming, concerts, social gatherings, and dancing in the pavilion. The park drew visitors from a large area. In June 1898, for example, Fargo railroad employees and their families and friends took a special train to Detroit Lakes where they spent the day in City Park "boating, fishing, dancing and [water] tobogganing, and in the afternoon a ballgame, Fargo vs. Crookston, was the attraction." Just two days earlier, the *Becker County Record* reported, the park hosted "the great Woodmen gathering" ("Railroad Excursion" 1898).

In February of 1903 Detroit Lakes was incorporated as a city. The first mayor was Everett W. Davis, a member of the original Park Committee. Members of the 15-member city charter commission included park enthusiasts John B. Carman and George D. Hamilton, and entrepreneur and hotel investor John K. West.

In September 1903, after the council had repeatedly declined to purchase the park, Carman and Hamilton determined they "could not afford to carry the [loan] paper longer" and new arrangements were made ("Lesson" 1937). The city of Detroit Lakes transferred its interest in the property to the Hotel Minnesota Company (whose president was Elon G. Holmes) in exchange for the company's promise to build a new summer hotel on the site by summer 1904. Carman and Hamilton sold the 12 acres to the hotel company for \$1,755 – their original purchase price – and the hotel company also bought three lots at the foot of Washington Avenue (the site of the current pavilion), adding to and squaring off the southwestern corner of the parcel. The hotel company began to build its four-story, wooden Hotel Minnesota Annex on the current pavilion site, but the building burned down during construction in April 1904 and the project was apparently abandoned ("City Buys" 1907).

During the next three years, use of the park evidently continued under an agreement between the city and the hotel company. In May 1907 – the month that the city's original ten-year lease on the site expired – the hotel company offered to sell the property (now 12 acres plus the three southwestern lots) to the city for about \$5,500 – a substantial increase over Carman and Hamilton's price of \$1,755. The next month, after some wrangling, the council agreed to buy the land for \$5,000 payable over nine years. According to the *Detroit Record*, the property included "several hundred feet of lakeshore, a fine plot of thrifty timber, and a large open space which with a little improvement can be converted into a splendid baseball ground as well as being suitable for other public purposes." The newspaper praised the council's action, noting that "the increasing importance of Detroit as a summer resort, as well as for the enjoyment of our citizens, makes this purchase one of great value to the city," but again scolded the city fathers for recalcitrance: "This city has been very negligent in the matter of acquiring suitable grounds for park purposes . . . and we are fortunate now in being able to secure so desirable a tract before further advances in value make the purchase of such lands prohibitive" ("City Buys" 1907).

Concerning the council's immediate plans for the park, the *Record* reported, "The council will have considerable improvements made this year, and doubtless the civic league will be able to do good work in the way of beautifying the grounds" ("City Buys" 1907). In May 1908 the city

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council appropriated \$500 for park improvements and in June a set of bleachers were built for the baseball diamond.

City Park became the community's principal site for festivals, public celebrations, and other large social gatherings. In late June and early July 1910, for example, the park was the venue for "the first Chautauqua course which this city has had for several years." Detroit Lakes put up \$2,200 for the event, which included lectures by half a dozen orators and concerts by the Chicago Operatic Company, the Chautauqua Ladies' Orchestra, and the Midland Jubilee Singers, "one of the greatest colored musical organizations in the country" ("Chautauqua Pleases People" 1910).

Detroit Lakes City Park became an important performance space for Detroit Lakes' lively local music scene. The Lakeside Band (later called the Detroit Lakes Band) was organized in 1884 and performed for more than 30 years. In the late 19th century, the brass band "was the main source of entertainment" in Detroit Lakes and had a paid director (Lake Park 1976: 38). Attired in navy blue cavalry uniforms, the band gave weekly concerts in the park during the summer and hosted popular band tournaments. In the 1910s and 1920s, the Detroit Orchestra, the White Earth Brass Band, and the Detroit Concert Orchestra all performed. Later, Detroit Lakes had a semi-professional "summer band," which gave concerts in City Park throughout the summer, supported by city appropriations.

The next major land acquisitions came in 1914 and 1915, evidently in conjunction with improvement of the ballpark. In 1914 the city acquired a small parcel adjacent to the northern end of City Park, approximately where the current grandstand is located. The following spring the city bought another one-half acre just east of the ballpark (extending north and south of the current basketball court) "to be purchased for the purpose of procuring sand to fill in the ballpark" ("Public Parks" ca. 1930). In 1915 the city also made the final installment in its payments to the Minnesota Hotel Company for the 12-plus acres. The mayor at the time was George D. Hamilton, one of the men who originally bought the land and leased it to the village for the park.

In May 1915, the Detroit Businessmen's Association, led by president John K. West, agreed to finance a new lakeside pavilion within the park at the foot of Washington Avenue. (The fate of the original 1897 pavilion is not known.) The city gradually paid back the construction notes over several years. The new red-roofed dance hall, just feet from the water's edge, was built by contractor A. S. Randolph. According to the *Detroit Record*, Randolph "was adamant about the flooring in the building being just right." The dance floor was pronounced "one of the finest," the newspaper said. In later years, local people would recall how the wood floor was oiled twice a week and buffed to perfection (Mayfield 2004). On opening day, Sept. 2, 1915, more than 2,000 people came to see the new pavilion, eat a picnic dinner, watch a baseball game between the married men of Detroit Lakes and the married men of nearby Audubon, and dance to the music of the Price Orchestra ("New Pavilion" 1915; Mayfield 2004).

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The pavilion was built during a time when public dancing was rising in popularity nationwide. The park and pavilion became *the* spot for all of Detroit Lakes' large summer gatherings, from community dinners to pageants, from charity balls to outdoor religious services. The pavilion was leased to a variety of operators including the Lakeside Band, the Detroit Amusement Company, Albert Challsen, and longtime operator Charles E. Waughop. In the mid-1920s, however, the pavilion was apparently struggling because in 1927 the city council reduced the rent "owing to the poor business during the season." ("Public Parks" ca. 1930).

In May of 1916 the city council allocated another \$1,000 for park improvements. This work may have included development of a municipal campground, which was apparently located near the current bandshell. By 1916, use of the park had evidently reached a point where the Park Board recommended employing a park policeman for five months during the summer ("Public Parks" ca. 1930).

During the 1920s, the Detroit Lakes Businessmen's Association took over management of the City Park campgrounds on behalf of the city, and slowly retired the debt against the property from campground revenues. (All camping was eventually moved to the American Legion Campgrounds several blocks west of the park.) Sewer and water were apparently extended to the pavilion in 1924. In the 1920s a wooden grandstand replaced bleachers at the baseball diamond. Swimming, boating, fishing, and picnicking remained very popular, and by the mid-1920s City Park also included an ice skating rink.

A key event in the park's history came in 1928 when the city nearly tripled the size of the park by buying 24 acres of woodland adjacent to the east from Edward C. and Lydia Kandt for \$6,000. The Businessmen's Association had been urging the expansion for several years ("Public Parks" ca. 1930). The new parcel extended from about the current bandshell and tennis courts east to Roosevelt Avenue and included a forested hill that became one of the most beautiful spots in the park. The park expansion occurred under the leadership of Henry D. Blanding, longtime head of Blanding Department Store, who was president of the Park Board for 25 years.

In 1935, the newly-formed Detroit Lakes chapter of the Jaycees (a businessmen's group that was also called the Junior Chamber of Commerce) held its first Northwest Water Carnival. Detroit Lakes City Park and its beach became the effective headquarters of the annual festival, with dances, concerts, picnics, pageants, sporting contests, swimming events, sailboat races, a water show, and a parade all scheduled in and around the park. The event was immediately popular – the 1936 carnival drew a crowd of 25,000 visitors and the multi-day festival soon became one of the mainstay events of Detroit Lakes' summer season. It has now been held annually for 72 years, except for the year 1937. Detroit Lakes' Northwest Water Carnival is one of the oldest festivals of its type in the state. (Other Minnesota cities that historically held summer water carnivals have included Granite Falls (carnival established 1936), Minneapolis (est. 1940), Hutchinson (est. 1942), Bemidji (est. 1943), Glenwood (est. 1955), and Hoyt Lakes (est. 1955).)

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### *Federal Relief Improvements*

Detroit Lakes City Park was significantly improved during the Depression when the city collaborated with the federally-funded Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of the largest New Deal Depression-relief agencies. WPA construction projects at City Park included improving the swimming beach, rebuilding the baseball field, general parkland beautification, and building a bathhouse (razed), parking area, recreation building, benches (removed), picnic fireplaces, and tennis courts and other recreational facilities. In August 1935 the city council approved Detroit Lakes' first WPA projects – a \$14,000 sewer extension and \$12,000 worth of improvements at the park. The city was expected to contribute \$3,887 for the two jobs. Work at City Park began the last week of October 1935. The crew included 55 men, 15 teams of draft horses, and three trucks, all working in two shifts. Project supervisor was engineer A. A. Hawkinson, and the foremen were William Germer and Harry Molander. The park workers were among 1,600 to 1,800 men assigned to WPA jobs in Minnesota's Seventh District that fall ("1,800 WPA Workers" 1935; "Work Started" 1935).

WPA workers began in October 1935 by hauling in hundreds of truck loads of black dirt (about 20,000 cubic feet) to fill and re-grade the western part of the park from the pavilion north through the ballpark. This low-lying area had originally been a tamarack swamp – a 1971 local history claimed the baseball field "was so spongy the players had difficulty keeping on their feet during the games" (Teague and Prentice 1971: 17). In addition to improving the ball field, WPA workers built the park's concrete tennis courts that fall.

Work at the park continued in 1937 when the WPA approved a \$32,509 construction plan, with the city's share to be \$8,000. The improvements were "urged by a committee from the Civic and Commerce Association consisting of Fred Wright, Charles W. Blanding, R. C. Videen, and Lewis J. Norby" ("City Council" 1936). The project was expected to employ 75 men, including 60 unskilled laborers, 9 semi-skilled workers, and 6 skilled men – most from the local area. The job began in January 1937 and included building sidewalks, footpaths, and the parking area; adding facilities for horseshoe, badminton, croquet, shuffleboard, and other games; constructing a bathhouse, dock, recreation building, picnic fireplaces, and seats and benches; cleaning up the swimming beach; and extending a water line in the park for lawn sprinkling ("City Council" 1936; "WPA Approves" 1937). Historic photos of the park show wooden picnic tables near the parking area and beach that were likely built by the WPA. A large photograph of City Park's newly-completed recreation building was published in *WPA Accomplishments*, the Works Progress Administration's final report for Minnesota covering the years 1936-1939.

### *After World War II*

World War II brought a halt to federal Depression-relief funding and to all non-essential construction in the United States. After the war, however, Detroit Lakes made major improvements to Washington Ballpark. In 1947 the *Detroit Record* urged construction of a new grandstand: "When three or four hundred fans crowd into the old wooden [grandstand] structure, there's no room to move a muscle." Lights for the field were needed, too, the *Record* said:

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“Attendance figures from towns having lights prove that night baseball has definitely arrived and no town without lights is going to be the leading baseball community in any area.” The newspaper argued, “Baseball is, and should be more of, an integral part of [the] varied activities offered our summer visitors” (“It’s Time” 1947). The following week the *Record* reported that 11,100 ticket-buying fans had attended baseball games in 1947, including a crowd of 2,000 which “jammed the park to see the battle with Fergus Falls” on July 13 (“Attendance” 1947).

In January 1948 voters in a 2:1 margin approved issuing \$45,000 in bonds for a new grandstand and lights. (Part of the debt would be paid with ticket receipts.) During the weeks before the vote, the Detroit Lakes Baseball Club presented a six-point argument in favor of the project declaring “Baseball is the favorite summer entertainment of the greater percentage of the population,” “Baseball combats child delinquency,” “Night baseball permits the patronage of the farmer and the working man fan,” and “Night baseball will make Detroit Lakes a greater summer resort attraction” (“Ball Park Election” 1948). The new grandstand was dedicated in August 1948. The field was also striped for football so that it could be used by the high school varsity football team. The following summer, in 1949, a locker room, two restrooms, a concession stand, and a ticket booth were created inside the new grandstand.

Postwar construction continued in 1955 when the city built a new brick bandshell northeast of the pavilion, replacing the city’s previous wooden bandshell near downtown. The new bandshell was built by Swedberg Construction Company and dedicated August 10, 1955, with a concert by the Detroit Lakes summer band. The \$11,000 facility was financed by a fundraising campaign that had begun in the late 1930s. The fundraising was given a boost in 1951 when summer band members voluntarily returned to city coffers “annual appropriations which in former years had been used for band expenses, including pay to members” (“Dedication of Band Shell” 1955). After the bandshell was built, the summer band continued to turn back its annual appropriation until the facility was paid for. (The 1955 bandshell was replaced in 2006 by the current bandshell in approximately the same location.)

In 1956, the swimming beach – always one of the park’s most popular attractions – was improved with a new municipal bathhouse with restrooms. The 40’ x 80’ building was built by T. A. Wisted and Sons at a cost of about \$21,500. The bathhouse replaced changing facilities that had been built by the WPA.

In 1965 the city began improvements to the public swimming beach. The beach was expanded to encompass a total of 3,800’, from the park’s bathhouse westward several blocks to a point near the American Legion Campgrounds at 810 West Lake Drive. After being filled and graded, the entire beach was covered with 25,000 cubic yards of “bleached sugar sand sucked from the bottom of Little Detroit Lake” (McEwan 1999). The project cost a total of \$250,000.

### Minnesota Amateur Baseball

Citizens have been playing baseball at Detroit Lakes City Park since about 1897. Games ranged from informal challenges at family picnics to the record-breaking state amateur tournament of

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1949, from summer programs for kids and adults to Detroit Lakes High School varsity ball. The history of baseball in the park in many ways has paralleled the development of baseball throughout Minnesota.

From modest beginnings around 1830, baseball became one of the country's leading, warm-weather, leisure activities by the mid-19th century. Since the 1850s baseball has been played by soldiers at Fort Ridgley and Fort Snelling, by children and adults in neighborhood vacant lots, and by farmers in pastures throughout the state. Minnesota's first organized baseball team formed in 1857. The Minnesota State Association of Baseball Players was organized in 1867 and the first inter-city baseball tournament was held that year. As an amateur pastime baseball had little competition from other organized sports for either players or audiences (Bernstein 2003: 10, 75, 146; Thornley 2006: 5-17; Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 4).

Professional ("minor league") baseball in Minnesota helped raise interest in the game and increase participation among players and fans. Minnesota's first professional league formed in 1884. The league's ten teams came from five Minnesota communities and from four other states. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Minnesota fans followed professional teams from cities like Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, Stillwater, St. Cloud, Winona, Northfield, and Virginia. Professional teams based near Detroit Lakes included those in Breckenridge-Wahpeton, Brainerd, Crookston, East Grand Forks, and Fargo-Moorhead. Fargo-Moorhead had some powerful clubs including the team that won the Red River Valley League championship in 1897, and the Fargo-Moorhead Grain Growers, which won the Northern League pennant in 1916 and 1917. Baseball became even more popular as Minnesota fans followed the careers of players who were traded from team to team or rose to the professional "major" leagues. Several Minnesota minor league teams were sponsored by major league teams as "farm teams" to help develop new talent. Fargo-Moorhead, for example, was associated with the Cleveland Indians, Pittsburgh Pirates, and New York Yankees, and Crookston was associated with the Chicago White Sox, St. Louis Cardinals, and Boston Red Sox (Bernstein 2003: 11-12, 63-67; Thornley 2006: 111-118).

Professional baseball in Minnesota was dwarfed by the amateur game played by children and adults. One of the first organizers of summer baseball for teenage boys in Minnesota was the American Legion, a military veterans' organization that founded a baseball program in Minnesota in 1925. (American Legion baseball is still the oldest and largest baseball program for teenagers in the United States.) Individual American Legion posts, including Legion Post 15 in Detroit Lakes, each sponsored a local baseball team. Minnesota had 100 American Legion teams in 1926 – the year of the first state tournament – and 514 Legion teams in 1935 – the peak year of participation. Minnesota is one of three states that has held a state tournament every year since 1926. Minnesota had the most American Legion teams in the country in 1959-1968 and has had the second-largest number of teams each year since 1969. Detroit Lakes' American Legion team played neighboring towns at Washington Park, and then vied for a spot in annual district and state tournaments. The American Legion also sponsored baseball programs for younger children including Little League and Babe Ruth Baseball. Girls were not allowed to play American Legion baseball until 1975 (Bernstein 2003: 142-144; "American Legion").

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Little League and VFW Baseball were also played in Washington Ballpark. Little League, founded in 1939 in Pennsylvania, was a program primarily for 11- and 12-year-old boys. (Girls were allowed to play in 1974.) The first national championship was held in 1947. VFW Baseball was established by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1955. The program targeted 15- and 16-year-old boys, but the VFW also sponsored “cub” and “midget” programs for younger children (Bernstein 2003: 144).

Minnesota State High School League varsity baseball was established in 1947 and the first state tournament was held that year. In 1950 the fourth-ever state high school baseball tournament was held in Washington Ballpark in Detroit Lakes. Since 1956 the tournament has usually been held in a larger stadium in Bloomington, St. Cloud, or St. Paul (Bernstein 2003: 113).

Since the 1860s the backbone of Minnesota baseball has been “town” or “town team” baseball, which is amateur baseball played by community teams composed of young men. According to Minnesota baseball historians Armand Peterson and Tom Tomashek, town team ball “offered townspeople the opportunity to embrace a team that included their family and friends, Main Street’s professionals, tradesmen and merchants, high school teachers and their student-athletes, and farmers from the surrounding countryside” (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: ix). In Minnesota town ball was wildly popular in the late 19th century through the entire 20th century, and was often the impetus for improvements in a community’s ballpark.

Minnesota baseball historian Ross Bernstein writes, “In small town America, being on a town team was like being royalty. It gave communities a sense of pride and helped them to form a sense of identity. Summers were planned around the teams’ schedules, and their games were front page news” (Bernstein 2003: 74). Local baseball teams often played to overflow crowds in games that were community social highlights. Town teams were dependent on community fundraisers to help cover costs, and sometimes the fundraisers themselves became important community events. When a ballpark was combined with other park facilities – as in Detroit Lakes – baseball was often an excuse for an even bigger event with families meeting to have a picnic before or after the game, and young children playing in the park while their parents watched the home team. Former United States Senator Eugene McCarthy, who played for his hometown of Watkins, Minnesota, in the 1920s and 1930s, wrote of his experience: “If you were fortunate enough to make the lineup, you possessed an automatic mark of distinction. Or if you were a fan, you went out on Sunday afternoons and rooted for the farmers and blacksmiths and school teachers and students and merchants who represented the community on the ballfield. We took the games seriously, which was part of the fun. And it was a pretty good brand of baseball most of the time” (McCarthy 1993: 159). Town league umpires were often retired players who were members of the Northwest Umpires Association and traveled from the Twin Cities to outstate Minnesota towns to officiate.

Town team baseball was very popular in the 1920s. The excitement was piqued in 1924 when the New York Yankees’ Babe Ruth came to Minnesota to play a string of exhibition games in

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Minneapolis, Sleepy Eye, and Sioux Falls. The first state town team tournament was held in St. Paul the same year. Beginning in 1924, the town team state tournament was governed by the Association of Minnesota Amateur Baseball Leagues, later called the Minnesota Amateur Baseball Association or MABA (Bernstein 2003: 74-76; Thornley 2006: 124).

Organized amateur baseball in Minnesota did quite well during the Depression when many professional teams in the United States folded, leaving talented players looking for opportunities and joining town teams (Thornley 2006: 113).

After a sharp decline in organized baseball during World War II, the popularity of amateur baseball soared after the war as young people came home and the nation embraced peacetime community activities. In 1946 alone, "returning servicemen flooded the state and almost 250 new teams started up" (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 5). So many men wanted to play that some Minnesota towns had two or three amateur teams. Peterson and Tomashek write, "From 1945 through 1960, Minnesota experienced a magical era of amateur ball, setting records in town participation and attendance that have not been matched since" (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: ix-x). Bernstein notes, "Between 1945 and 1959 the state tournament drew over 20,000 fans on nearly a dozen occasions. And, in 1950 alone, Minnesota had 950 amateur and semi-pro teams playing in 103 leagues" (Bernstein 2003: 76).

While town teams were generally called "amateur," the term is partly a misnomer because teams in certain classifications (e.g., Class A and Class AA) were allowed to use a few "outside" or nonresident players and a few paid players. Rules were often stretched in the midst of fierce competition between towns, especially in the late 1940s to mid-1950s. Players sometimes took up residence in a town suspiciously close to the start of the season, or were compensated with summer jobs or by other indirect means to circumvent the limit on paid players. In 1951 the Minnesota Amateur Baseball Association dropped the word "Amateur" from its name in recognition of the fact that many teams used some paid and outside players (Thornley 2006: 127; Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 74).

The Detroit Lakes Lakers were a powerful team in the Minnesota Amateur Baseball Association's North Central League. The Lakers won the league championship and advanced to the state tournament several times in the mid-century including 1928, 1942, 1943, 1946, 1955, and 1967. (The Lakers took second place in the state championship in 1992.)

The Detroit Lakes Lakers were one of six teams in the North Central League in 1948. In addition to dozens of regular games, most town teams also played exhibition games against traveling "barnstorming" teams, events that raised operating funds and gave the players more practice. The traveling team usually played for a share of the gate receipts (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 34, 45-47).

Detroit Lakes and archrival Fergus Falls were often matched up in the league play-offs, and their games invariably drew big crowds. In 1946, for example, nearly 2,000 fans watched the Lakers

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defeat the Fergus Falls Red Sox at Washington Ballpark to become league champions. (The Lakers fell to Springfield in the state tournament in Owatonna that year.) In 1949 a regular season game between the Lakers and the Red Sox (played in Fergus Falls) set a state record for attendance. In 1950 a series of playoff games between Detroit Lakes and Fergus Falls again drew more than 2,000 fans per game. Fergus Falls became the state champion that year (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 9, 351).

In 1948, the Detroit Lakes Lakers signed former minor league players Bob Haas, a pitcher, and his catcher Bob Hall, touching off a war for talent in the North Central League. The controversy resulted in the creation of a new league class, Class B, that was reserved for strictly amateur teams, with no outsiders and no paid players. That same year, right in the middle of the league playoffs, Detroit Lakes and Fergus Falls were cited for having too many outside players and the whole league was bumped up to the tougher Class AA. "Neither team seriously protested the ruling," write Peterson and Tomashek. In fact, Fergus Falls and Detroit Lakes fans were thrilled, "and the league decided to remain in Class AA in 1949" (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 27-28, 135, 150).

In 1949, shortly after Washington Ballpark received a new grandstand and lights, Detroit Lakes hosted the state amateur baseball championship, an annual contest that Ross Bernstein calls "one of Minnesota's most treasured sporting events" (Bernstein 2003: 74). Historians Peterson and Tomashek explain:

The MABA [Minnesota Amateur Baseball Association] awarded the State Tournament to Detroit Lakes, by far the northernmost city to be the host – and 207 miles from Shakopee, the 1948 site. Detroit Lakes had installed lights in 1948 and improved the grandstand and bleacher seating in 1949 [sic] to accommodate up to 5,000 [sic] fans at Washington Park. The baseball-mad town spent an estimated \$50,000 on the park over a two-year period. State officials were gearing up for an anticipated fourth consecutive year of record-breaking attendance (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 52).

The 1949 state tournament at Washington Ballpark was a packed 10 days of baseball. Peterson and Tomashek write, "Total attendance of 28,564 fell 5,716 short of the record set at Shakopee in 1948, but edged out Mankato's 1947 figures for second place on the list. This was quite an accomplishment, considering the [rainy, windy] weather and the northern location. Railroads were a big help in providing transportation" with special coaches bringing in fans (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 54).

The Lakers themselves did not play in the 1949 state tournament. They had been defeated in the playoffs by Fergus Falls in an intense set of games that drew a combined audience of 10,000.

In 1951, the North Central League was reorganized as a Class A league. Most of the teams in the league were weary of the cost of competing with the free-spending Lakers and Fergus Falls Red

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Sox. Community interest in town ball was beginning to wane, attendance was dropping, and "fans were tiring of the constant fund-raising required to support" ambitious local teams. Fergus Falls and Detroit Lakes tried to join the West Central League to remain Class AA, but that league was full so the two towns remained with the North Central and became Class A teams instead (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 60, 69, 152, 171).

Participation in amateur/semi-professional leagues in Minnesota peaked in 1950, a year when Minnesota had 799 amateur teams. The same peak occurred in minor professional leagues across the United States. Interest among players and fans remained high through the 1950s, but television, air-conditioned movie theatres, new automobiles, more lake cabins, and golf were competing for the audience, despite low ticket prices. Increasingly, Minnesota fans began to watch college baseball and to follow the Minnesota Twins, which became the state's first and only major league baseball team in 1961 (Thornley 2006: 132-133, 140-143; Peterson and Tomashek 2006: xii, 50, 69).

By the mid-1950s, the Lakers, like many Minnesota town teams, had dropped their paid players and returned to the less-expensive game of amateur ball. In 1955, the Lakers, now competing in Class B, again won a trip to the state tournament. The Lakers were eliminated in the first round, 8-18, against Bagley. Amateur town team baseball has continued to be popular in Detroit Lakes and across the state since then (Bernstein 2003: 81).

### *Ballparks*

Washington Ballpark in Detroit Lakes City Park was similar in appearance to many other ballparks in Minnesota, both before and after the 1948 improvements. (See historic photographs in Thornley 2006 and Peterson and Tomashek 2006.)

Early ballparks in Minnesota were simple affairs with infields of dirt or sand, and outfields of rough long grass and gopher holes. Fans sat on the ground or on wooden benches or bleachers. Specialized ballparks with larger grandstands were built in Minnesota at least as early as the 1880s. The Twin Cities' most important early ballparks, Nicollet Park in Minneapolis and Lexington Park in St. Paul, were built in 1896 and 1897, respectively, and improved in the 1910s. (Both have been razed.) Nicollet Park's field was 450' x 379' and its grandstand seated 4,000; Lexington Park was 600' x 600' (Thornley 2006: 33-37).

Many Minnesota ballparks were built during the Depression as New Deal public works projects. After World War II when disposable incomes rose nationwide, amateur baseball flourished and many Minnesota communities improved their ballparks. Peterson and Tomashek write, "Money was readily available for civic projects [after the war]. There was no problem raising money to pave a gravel road leading to main street, build a fire station, fund a school addition, build a tennis court – or build a new grandstand or install lights at the local baseball field. Similarly, it was relatively easy to raise money to support a baseball team" (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 60).

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In many towns, postwar improvements included lights. In 1939 New Ulm's Johnson Park became the first baseball park in outstate Minnesota to install lights. While few Minnesota teams had lights in 1946, "dozens of towns were planning to install lights in 1947" after seeing them in Owatonna at the 1946 state tournament. Peterson and Tomashek write:

Postwar prosperity made money available for recruiting top players and for building new fields or improving existing ones, and it seemed like everyone was talking about lights. Over 150 towns did install lights in the next four years. It became a feeding frenzy – baseball fans and businessmen in one town would not sit idle while a nearby rival installed lights on its field. . . . Lights were not cheap – about \$15,000 (\$131,370 in 2005 dollars), depending on the amount of volunteer labor contributed for assembly and installation. Various means were used to raise the money, but in towns buying lights there were very few arguments about whether the money should be spent in the first place (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 13).

Millerbernd Manufacturing of Winsted was Minnesota's most popular supplier of ballfield lights. A typical set of "premium" lights "consisted of eight four-legged 80' steel towers, each with 20 enclosed incandescent lights." Peterson and Tomashek note, "For most towns, the new lighting system represented the first major capital improvement in the town since the Depression – people were proud of the new facility, optimistic about the future" (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 14, 16).

Lights helped ease baseball scheduling because rained-out games could be played at night. Lights played a big role in increasing both the number of games played each season and the size of the audiences. Before lighting, amateur town ball games were generally limited to Sunday afternoons, but after lights were installed many leagues added a mid-week night game. In Detroit Lakes, the Lakers' regular season grew from 10 games in 1948 to 20 games in 1949 (Peterson and Tomashek 2006: 8, 11, 34, 47).

### **The Development of Municipal Parks in the United States**

Detroit Lakes City Park was established at the same time that the municipal parks movement was building nationwide. The number of parks increased in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century as society began to value public parks and as the nation's population grew. By the 1890s American workers were getting half-days off on Saturdays, which increased their free time. Parks became popular because they supported public leisure, beautified cities, preserved scenic land, and raised property values for adjacent residential areas (Carr 1998: 24, 52).

Detroit Lakes City Park was created in 1897 during the period in which several other Minnesota cities were also establishing their first large municipal parks. For example, Fargo acquired land for its Island Park in 1878, and St. Cloud's Lake George was encircled with a drive in 1883 (it was improved with a beach and other amenities in the 1920s). Minneapolis acquired its first

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large park in 1883 and St. Paul made plans to develop its first large park, Como Park, in 1887. Mankato purchased 120 acres for Sibley Park in 1887. Duluth voters approved issuing bonds for a public park system in 1889. Itasca State Park was created in 1891, and the Dalles of the St. Croix (now Interstate State Park) became a state park in 1895. Moorhead got its first multi-acre park in 1922, and Granite Falls' 100-acre Memorial Park was established in 1925. The Minnesota legislature supported the development of urban parks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by periodically passing laws that enabled cities to fund parks, parkways, playgrounds, and recreational fields with taxes and special assessments.

Detroit Lakes City Park was created the same year that the American Park Association was founded in Louisville, Kentucky. Comprised of "landscape architects, park commissioners, village improvement societies, women's groups, and various other individuals interested in parks and civic improvement," the group held its first regular convention in 1898 in Minneapolis (Carr 1998: 50). Soon after, the American Society of Landscape Architects formed in 1899. (The landscape architecture field grew along with American parks.) A few years later, the American Association of Park Superintendents formed in 1904 and the Playground Association of America formed in 1906. The National Park Service was established in 1916.

American city parks developed from open common lands that had often been used for utilitarian purposes such as grazing. America's first public park was Boston Common, set aside as common pasture in 1630. In the words of one historian, "From these origins in animal husbandry and stewardship, the park became associated with the health of both people and the city itself" (Spirm 1989: 206). By 1800, many cities had plazas or town squares – small, open green spaces that presented a restful counterpoint to the hectic city. About the same time, park-like cemeteries became popular for picnics and strolls. Cemeteries were the first to use landscaping to create a harmonious natural setting, and served as models for the design of later city parks (Cranz 1989: 25; Armstrong 1976: 554-556; Newton 1971: 268; Rutz 1989; Kornbluh 1993). By the mid-19th century, "the popularity of cemeteries as tourist attractions and 'pleasure grounds' signaled a demand for public parks," according to an observer of the time (Linden-Ward 1989: 121-123).

### *Landscape Parks*

Cities began building public parks (as opposed to town squares) about 1850. The first urban parks were "conceived as great pleasure grounds meant to be pieces of the country, with fresh air, meadows, lakes, and sunshine right in the city" (Cranz 1989: 5). These vast tracts of rural scenery, sometimes called landscape parks, offered a place for quiet contemplation of nature, and a refuge for workers from the clamor and turmoil of the city (Newton 1971: 267, 287, 620; Cutler 1985: 8). Park advocates believed that "nature itself had the power to uplift the human spirit, as well as aid the moral development of society" (Tuason 1997: 125).

According to landscape architect John Charles Olmsted (son of Frederick Law Olmsted) writing in 1897, "Large parks should contain a complete natural landscape, where the boundaries will

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not be obtrusive, where one may stroll over hill and dale, across meadows and through woods always amid natural surroundings for hours and hours," where throngs of visitors can enjoy the scenery "without crowding each other out," and where "the roar of street traffic is less noticeable than the rustle of leaves" (Carr 1998: 50).

From 1858 through the early 20th century, most large cities in America built landscape parks, inspired by the success of Central Park in New York (1858), Fairmont Park in Philadelphia (1865), and Prospect Park in Brooklyn (1866). The parks were large – ideally several hundred acres – and were usually built on land at or beyond the periphery of the built-up area of the city. Cities were growing rapidly, and park planners correctly anticipated that the grid of streets would eventually engulf the parks and make them more central (Tuason 1997: 126).

Landscape parks featured softly meandering, tree-formed designs that created a picturesque, country-like setting, neither wilderness nor formal garden, but something in between (Newton 1971: 620; Cranz 1989: 24; Spirn 1989). Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York's Central Park, favored "open meadows and lawns in large central areas, use of native trees and shrubs, roads and paths laid out in widespread curves, major roadways circumscribing the parks, preservation of the natural scenery, and informal design" (Armstrong 1976: 556). Some designers of 19th century landscape parks manipulated the landscape dramatically – e.g., moving streams, dredging lakes, contouring hills – while designers in the 20th century increasingly used a lighter touch, preserving a landscape's natural assets and judiciously enhancing them with less dramatic intervention (Carr 1998: 48).

Vegetation in urban landscape parks was controlled – forests were selectively cut to create vistas, "volunteer" trees were kept in check, and grasses were often mowed or pastured to keep them low. "Landscape management otherwise was kept as inconspicuous as possible, and physical development exhibited a character considered appropriate to the character of what were often wooded, relatively secluded landscapes" (Carr 1998: 49).

Park roads and paths were curved to counter the surrounding grid of streets and to create open meadows. Buildings, a necessary evil required to make parks usable, were generally only one or two stories to keep a low profile. Landscape parks often had walls to mark boundaries, and walkways and footpaths beaten in the grass. Entrance gates conveyed "a message that the parks should be taken seriously as an expression of a high level of cultural achievement" (Cranz 1989: 24, 35, 42, 46, 49). Some parks had formal structures and gardens influenced by the Beaux Arts style of the City Beautiful movement.

Landscape parks were intended for use by all the residents of a city. Their purpose was usually passive recreation. Visitors would stroll along the landscaped grounds, families would picnic, and youngsters might run and play or start up an impromptu game. Other activities considered appropriate in these serene green spaces included horseback and carriage rides, ice skating, lawn tennis, and croquet. The parks also functioned as concert grounds and public spaces for ceremonies and social gatherings (Newton 1971: 623; Armstrong 1976: 556; Cranz 1989: 7, 66; Kornbluh 1993; Tuason 1997).

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By 1900, American city parks had come to represent certain romantic and democratic ideals. Frederick Law Olmsted called them “democratic places where people of all classes can have friendly interactions” (Bachrach 2001: 7). The idea was that people from different walks of life and socio-economic class could “rub shoulders and dissipate class hostilities and rivalries” (Cranz 1989: 183).

At the turn of the 20th century, urban parks began to change. Sports and games became the focus, while advocates of natural scenery “turned increasingly away from the city and toward county, state, and national parks as the locus of an ‘authentic’ natural experience” (Tuason 1997: 133). Over the next 30 years, the nation’s large, 19th century landscape parks were adapted – some said spoiled – to meet the recreational needs of the new century (Tuason 1997: 124; Cran z 1989: 61; Martin 1989; Spirn 1989).

### *Playgrounds*

Beginning around 1900, a new generation of smaller city parks were built to provide neighborhood recreational spaces devoted to active play, rather than contemplation of scenery. The new urban “playground parks” were noisy, busy places buzzing with activity, where utility trumped beauty. Unlike landscape parks, playground parks were small – usually one to ten acres – and located in inner city neighborhoods where they were accessible to working classes of people. Naturalistic landscaping was of secondary concern in their planning and design.

Playground parks and other facilities for active recreation grew out of the ideals of the Progressive Era, a time of sweeping social reform in the United States. During the first decades of the 20th century there was growing concern over the social conditions in American cities as immigrants moved into crowded neighborhoods and urban poverty increased. “Overcrowding, disease epidemics, lack of play space, and the rising incidence of juvenile crime and delinquency all contributed to what became, by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, a resounding call for the creation of small parks and public playgrounds in cities across the United States” (Tuason 1997: 136). Recreation became equated with character formation, and parks came to be seen as tools for promoting the public good. Parks were virtuous alternatives to urban evils such as saloons, gambling parlors, street loitering, and amusement parks, which were “notorious for untidiness, boisterous behavior, and a degree of hoodlumism” (Newton 1971: 605; Cutler 1985: 19).

During this reform era, children became a major focus of park planning (Cranz 1989: 63). Park leaders considered children’s play “as a natural instinct which would find an outlet in deviant behavior if thwarted” (Cranz 1989: 66). Organized games would foster physical health and facilitate the teaching of positive social behavior.

Cities were urged to provide athletic fields, swimming pools, tennis courts, golf courses, swimming beaches, and playgrounds. Park planners developed various urban open space

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Detroit Lakes City Park  
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standards, with some experts recommending, for example, five acres of playing fields per 1,000 people (Conway 2000: 118).

Two playground facilities that served as early models were located in Boston: an immensely popular “sand garden,” built in 1885, where children could play and dig, and an “outdoor gymnasium,” which opened a few years later. One early advocate, George A. Paker who was superintendent of parks in Hartford, Connecticut, from 1895 to 1915, promoted city parks that incorporated “playgrounds, shaded areas, grass, seats and tables, flowers but few shrubs, a stadium for contests, and an indoor and outdoor gymnasium” (Armstrong 1976: 560). In Chicago, a new type of city park building was introduced – the field house – which often included “assembly halls, classrooms, clubrooms, cafeterias, the earliest local branch libraries, indoor gymnasiums, locker rooms, and public bathing facilities” (Bachrach 2001: 77). The National Recreation Association suggested that city parks should include a centralized shelter house, tennis courts, wading pools, athletic fields, running tracks, tot lots and free play areas (Cutler 1985: 15; Newton 1971: 625; Cranz 1989: 62, 86; Kornbluh 1993).

Landscape historian Norman Newton observes that playground parks “became community centers of great effectiveness and were soon emulated in many cities” (Newton 1971: 624). Playgrounds and recreational fields were promoted by groups such as the Playground Association of America, which was established in 1907. The group began to publish a national journal in 1907, and reorganized as the National Recreation Association in 1930. Women’s clubs, landscape professionals, city planners, housing organizations, and nonprofit social groups also promoted playground parks. By 1910, 180 cities nationwide had at least one public playground park, and by 1930, 695 cities had them. Playground parks in the United States jumped from about 1,300 in 1910 to more than 7,000 in 1930 (Tuason 1997: 137-140).

Theodore Wirth, superintendent of the Minneapolis park system from 1906-1935 and thereafter supervisor emeritus, described his awakening to the importance of active play in urban parks: “Along with other park men . . . I myself was more or less an adherent to and believer in the old school concept that parks are established first for their beauty and the aesthetic dignity they lend to their surroundings and community as a whole; and secondly for the more passive types of recreation rendered the public through drives, walks, and places for rest and relaxation. However, [around the turn of the century] the early stirrings and quickening of the playground movement had become evident, and this newer theory – the rendering of parks more useful to youth and to the public in general – appealed to me immensely” (Wirth 1945: 220).

A 1922 national inventory of parks outlined the wide range of urban parks in use, including large, unspoiled landscape parks, smaller neighborhood “intown parks,” playfields for adults and older children; neighborhood “gymnasiums” or playgrounds for boys and girls, preschool play areas, and special facilities such as swimming pools, bathing beaches, and skating ponds (Newton 1971: 627). By the 1930s, people had come to regard “adequate recreational space as vital to the smooth functioning of civilization,” according to landscape historian Phoebe Cutler (Cutler 1985: 27). City parks were now an expected feature of urban life, and “recreation had been accepted as an essential of life, like health, education, work, and religion” (Cranz 1989:

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101).

### *Tourist Parks*

According to landscape historian Ethan Carr, the appeal of organized sports and recreation steadily grew in the 1880s and 1890s, "But no form of recreation ultimately proved more popular to Americans than discretionary travel – tourism – and related activities" (Carr 1998: 52). The availability of moderately-priced automobiles beginning in the 1910s allowed people to leave home – whether it be a city, remote farm, or small town – and travel freely (Carr 1998: 53). As fledgling highway systems were devised and automobile clubs "blazed" scenic auto routes, the number of travelers increased. At first, growing numbers of automobile tourists could be a nuisance, setting up camp wherever they wanted along the road, in farmers' fields, or in the public schoolyard. By the 1920s towns and cities like Detroit Lakes were establishing municipal camping grounds to both attract auto tourists and to congregate these visitors into appropriate settings with running water, privies, and safe places for campfires (Koutsky and Koutsky 2006: 165).

### *Swimming Beaches*

Revere Beach, which opened in 1896 in a suburb of Boston, is said to be the first public bathing beach in the United States acquired and developed expressly for this purpose. It was designed by landscape architect Charles Eliot, who "had no precedent whatever to guide him," according to landscape historian Norman Newton (Newton 1971: 327). Beginning in the late 1890s, amusement park rides, concession stands, dance pavilions, roller-skating rinks, and other entertainment venues often opened near public bathing beaches. In his history of the Minneapolis park system, Theodore Wirth writes that public demand led Minneapolis to begin building beaches and bathhouses around 1888 and that "bathing continued to grow in popularity and petitions were received demanding enlargement of facilities." Minneapolis, like other cities endowed with swimming beaches, added and improved bathhouses steadily through 1945, as well as installing water slides, diving towers, and swimming rafts (Wirth 1945: 237-245). Like playgrounds, athletic fields, and public campgrounds, swimming beaches and swimming pools were often built by New Deal workers during the Depression.

### *Dance Pavilions*

Specialized dance ballrooms and pavilions were built in the United States for the first time around 1900. They were often sited in parks and near lakes and beaches. Public dancing was growing in popularity, conservative moral strictures were beginning to relax, and new forms of music like ragtime and early jazz were emerging. Music was being popularized through radio, phonographs, and the cinema, and larger and more diverse audiences – especially young people – were being drawn to social dancing. According to one historian, by the 1920s dancing was the nation's second most popular form of recreation – surpassed only by baseball (Gault 1989:13).

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Hundreds of pavilion ballrooms were built nationwide during the first half of the 20th century, generally in parks or near lakes. They were often simple wooden buildings with truss roofs, modestly-sized dance floors, and small stages. Most lakeside dance pavilions in the Midwest were operated only in the summer. Most were originally built with no window glass, heating, or air conditioning. They generally had large screened windows that allowed lake breezes to flow through and cool the dancers. Pavilion ballrooms were often successful because of their locations. Big city residents would drive long distances to escape the heat and dance at a lakeshore, and tourists and seasonal residents staying at nearby hotels and summer cottages often swelled the crowd (Gault 1989: 78-90). Pavilions in small Minnesota towns like Detroit Lakes could often attract nationally-known musical talent because many dance bands relied on small-town bookings, scheduled en route between big-city ballrooms, as an important source of revenue.

### *The New Deal*

During the Great Depression, there was a huge expansion in municipal park use. Families had little money for commercial recreation and travel, and instead patronized local parks. Recreation programming expanded with a growing emphasis on the importance of physical fitness. With federal money, cities hired playground supervisors and recreation directors. New Deal work relief agencies like the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) collaborated with local governments to build new sports fields, grandstands, tennis and basketball courts, skating rinks, swimming pools, beaches, parks, and playgrounds. In many cases, towns acquired facilities they would not otherwise have been able to obtain. Federal spending on local recreation during the New Deal was surpassed only by local road and street construction (Cutler 1985: 9-11; Armstrong 1976: 563).

The Works Progress Administration, in particular, made significant contributions to parks and recreation. Established in May, 1935, it was the federal government's largest New Deal work relief program. From 1935 to 1943, the WPA employed some eight million people to work on public construction projects as well as playground supervision, health care, homemaking, clerical work, and arts and cultural activities. About ten percent of WPA projects were devoted to parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other outdoor recreation facilities. From 1935 to 1938, the WPA built or improved more than 15,000 parks, playgrounds and athletic fields, and constructed 11,600 swimming pools, golf courses, tennis courts, trails, outdoor theaters, and bandshells nationwide (Armstrong 1976: 562-564). In July 1939 the Works Progress Administration was reorganized as the Work Projects Administration, which was also known by the initials WPA.

### *The Postwar Period*

After World War II, many American cities, like Detroit Lakes, experienced another period of park investment. During the war, "Large numbers of service personnel for the first time had experienced an opportunity to enjoy extensive recreation facilities and diversified programs" provided by the military (Armstrong 1976: 566). After the war ended, returning servicemen expected good recreation facilities at home, too. A healthy postwar economy made public

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expenditures possible and, after so many years of Depression and war, the public was in the mood to support community activities. Large community-wide celebrations became popular, and city parks hosted larger and more numerous pageants, festivals, and musical events. In the 1950s, Americans' leisure time continued to grow, topping 2,000 hours per year. Recreation expenditures in the 1950s climbed to five percent of American consumer spending – up from three percent in 1909 – fueling the park construction boom (Cranz 1989: 114-116, 119).

In the postwar period, park structures were increasingly built from inexpensive and prefabricated modern materials including concrete block, steel I-beams, and fiberglass. Chain-link or “cyclone wire” fence, which was mass-produced and easy to maintain, was used instead of walls or vegetation to mark boundaries. Park roads were widened and paved with bituminous. Lights were installed, trash cans appeared everywhere, and colored park equipment and furnishings were introduced. Signs, formerly limited to park entrances, became more prominent “to identify park boundaries, paths, and playgrounds and in general to organize the use of the park” (Cranz 1989: 124-132).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Detroit Lakes City Park, established in 1897 and improved in 1935-1937, has been a vital part of Detroit Lakes' community life and summer tourism industry for decades. Since its founding, it has been the city's main park, drawing townspeople and visitors for picnicking, swimming, dancing, concerts, baseball games, social gatherings, reunions, and festivals. Generations of residents and tourists have enjoyed the park's natural assets and man-made buildings and structures. Detroit Lakes City Park also exemplifies many state and national trends in urban park development including the establishment of city parks in the late 19th century, the popularity of dance pavilions, the rise of public waterfronts and water carnivals, the playground movement, the craze for baseball, federal New Deal investment in public infrastructure, and renewed interest in parks and recreation immediately after World War II.

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### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA, CONTINUED

#### Additional UTM References

Ref	Zone	Easting	Northing
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6	15	283189	5187422
7	15	283135	5187632

#### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated property are shown by the solid black line on the accompanying sketch map entitled "Detroit Lakes City Park, Detroit Lakes, Becker County, Minnesota."

#### Boundary Justification

The nominated property is comprised of the parcel of land historically associated with Detroit Lakes City Park.

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Detroit Lakes City Park

Name of property

Becker County, MN

County and State

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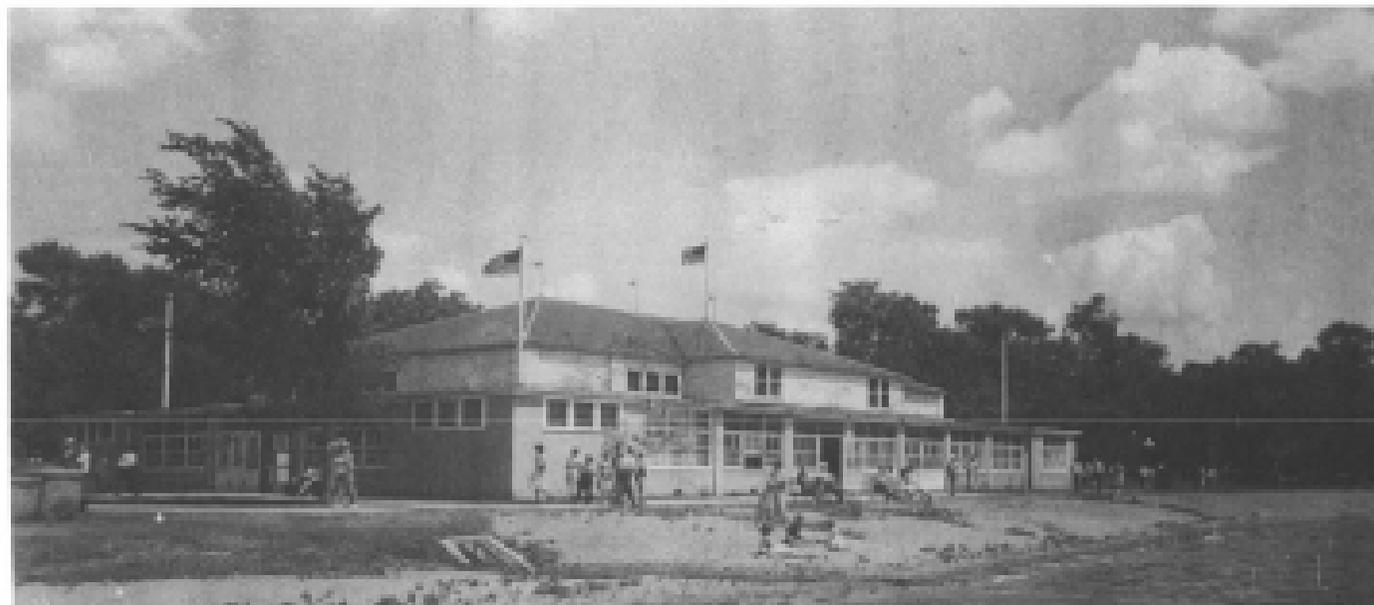
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**DETROIT LAKES CITY PARK NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION PHOTOS**  
photos by Gemini Research, fall 2006

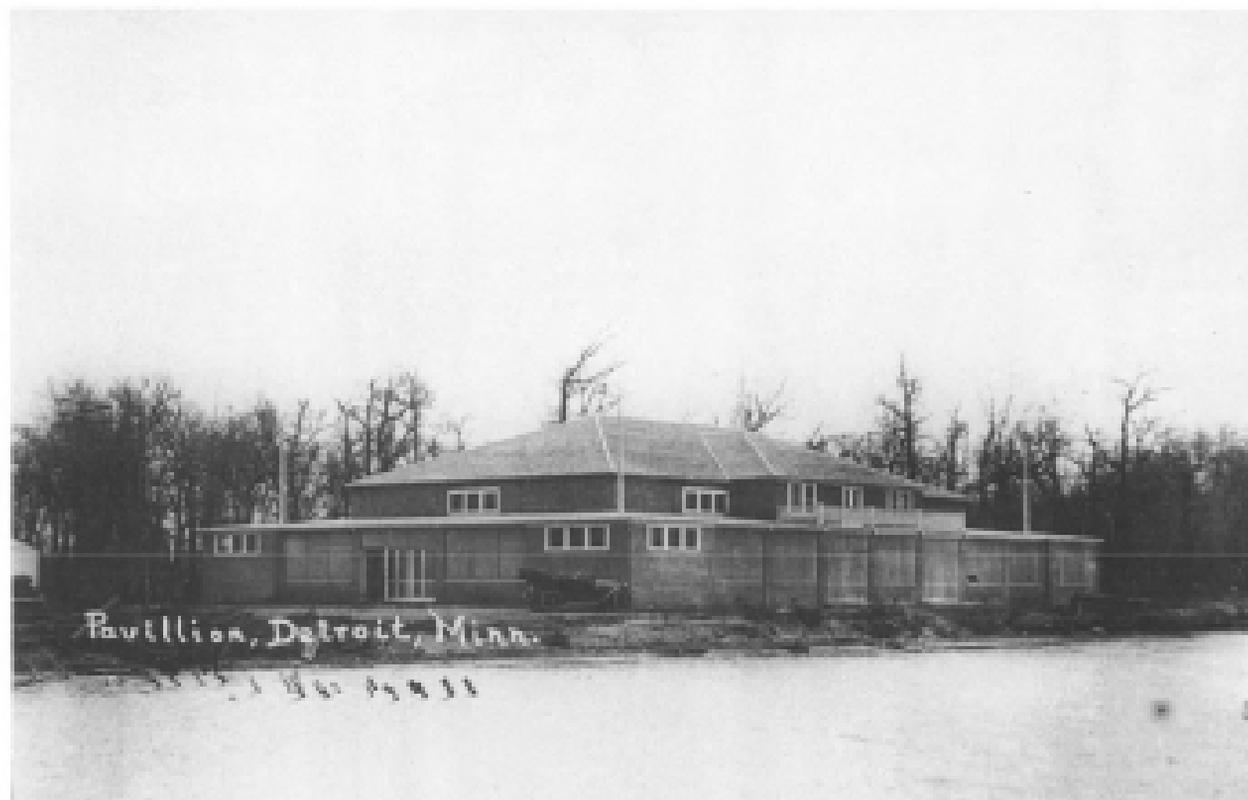
Nomination Photo	Minnesota Historical Society Negative	Digital Image on CD	View
01		MN_BeckerCounty_DLCityPark1.tif	North Shore Drive in foreground; picnic shelter at left; pavilion, the lake and Washington Avenue at right. The stone gateposts are east of (left of) the picnic shelter.
02	015043 frame 35		Stone gateposts; Washington Ballpark in distance
03		MN_BeckerCounty_DLCityPark3.tif	Parking area from North Shore Drive; bandshell and bathhouse in distance
04		MN_BeckerCounty_DLCityPark4.tif	Washington Ballpark
05	015041 frame 16		Grandstand
06	015041 frame 04		Recreation building; playground at left edge of photo
07	015041 frame 05		Tennis court; recreation building in distance
08	015041 frame 10		Softball field
09	015042 frame 30		Pavilion and swimming beach
10	015042 frame 29		Bathhouse
11	015042 frame 26		Swimming beach
12		MN_BeckerCounty_DLCityPark12.tif	Picnic fireplaces
13	015042 frame 22		Picnic shelter from hill in eastern half of park
14	015042 frame 15		Eastern half of park with North Shore Drive in foreground; taken from near northeastern corner of park
15	015042 frame 02		Wooded eastern half of park



Recreation building, facing northwest. Circa 1940. (Minnesota Historical Society)



Pavilion and swimming beach, facing northeast. Circa 1940s. (Becker County Historical Society)



Pavilion, facing northeast. Circa 1920s. (Minnesota Historical Society)



Aerial view of City Park. Washington Ballpark is near top left; pavilion is at lower left; the white rectangle near the center is the tennis courts. 1939. Photo by Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. (MnDNR)



Swimming beach with pavilion in background, facing west. Circa 1890. (Minnesota Historical Society)



Washington Avenue, facing north, with City Park at right. Washington (Ballpark) grandstand is near the top of the photo. North Lake Shore Drive, flanked by the stone gateposts, is at right. Circa 1930s. (Becker County Historical Society)



Washington Ballpark, facing north. Circa 1950. (Minnesota Historical Society)



Parking area from south edge, facing north, with visitors picnicking beneath the trees. The recreation building is in the distance (near top right). Near the recreation building is a sign that reads "City Park Playground." Circa 1930. (Minnesota Historical Society)

Sketch Map  
 Detroit Lakes City Park  
 Detroit Lakes, Becker Co., MN

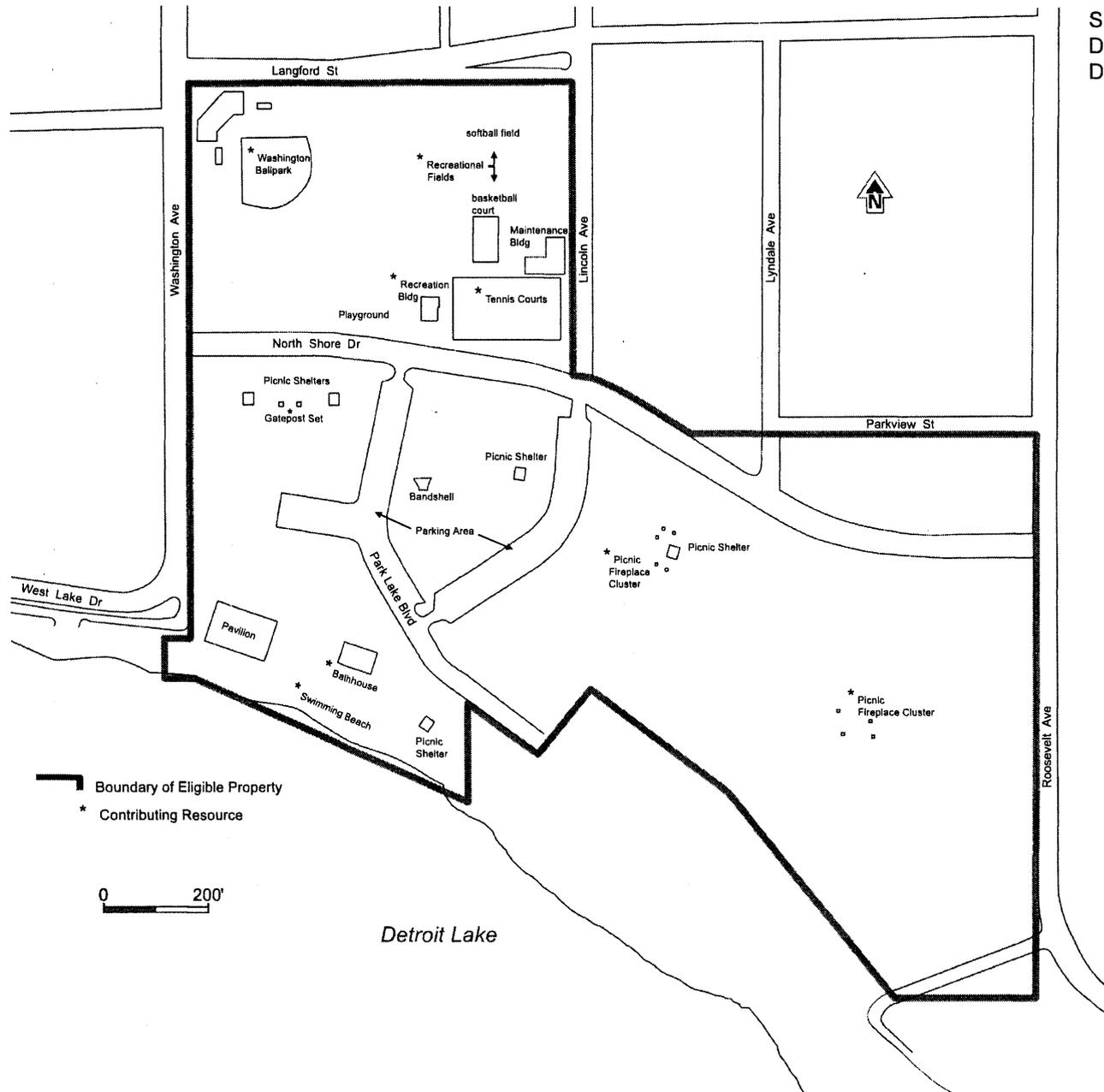


Photo ID Map  
Detroit Lakes City Park  
Detroit Lakes, Becker Co., MN

