

**THE ORIGIN &
DEVELOPMENT
OF ROCHESTER'S PARK
SYSTEM**

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The Origin & Development of Rochester's Park System by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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Gorge of the Geese

The
Origin & Development
of
Rochester's Park System

By a Veteran Reporter



Nineteen Hundred and Eight

Union and Advertiser Press

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Dr. E. M. Moore

The Formative or Preliminary Period



THE ROCHESTER PARK SYSTEM, which is the glory and boast of our city to-day and the envy and admiration of visitors from distant parts of this country and Europe, is the achievement of persistent effort and unselfish zeal on the part of a group of patriotic citizens whose sole aim in their onerous labors was to provide pleasure and innocent diversion for the present and future generations, to add to the attractiveness of our beautiful city and by providing perpetual breathing places which might contribute to the moral uplifting, physical development and health of our inhabitants.

The story of the origin and development of this park system is of deep interest to Rochesterians, containing as it does, many hitherto unpublished facts in regard to the early struggles of its champions, many of whom, have passed to the great beyond.

It was not until 1888 that the efforts of these patriotic citizens to provide parks for Rochester met with Legislative sanction and authority granted for the organizing of a Board of Park Commissioners with power to acquire \$300,000 for park purposes.

This seemed like the crowning success of long effort to obtain a park system for Rochester. It was, however, only the entering wedge of unparalleled difficulties.

For many years the park advocates had endeavored to mould public opinion in favor of the project but with small success. The people, for the most part, were opposed to the creation of parks, some from narrow minded reasons, such as fear of taxation and extravagant and useless expenditure in a city beautified by trees along its streets and many open spaces. Others regarded the creation of parks as a menace to the moral development of our youth. Others thought that the surrounding countryside afforded

all the opportunities needed for the recreation of our people. Others—in the early eighties—did not consider Rochester big enough to require a park system and gave no thought to the future when, as is the case now—our city became the center of enormous manufacturing and commercial activities having the greatest diversity of industries of any city of its size in the country. Others maintained that the advocates of a park system were actuated by selfish motives, or that they desired only to cater to the requirements of the rich.



Sheep at Genesee Valley Park

A vast number of people could not, or would not, realize that a group of our foremost citizens were acting solely for the benefit of the people at large and more particularly for the great army of industrials and work-a-day men, women and children who needed beautiful resorts in which to enjoy the delights of nature and breathe the pure air in seasons of respite from their daily toil. Yet this was exactly what the originators of the park system most earnestly desired.

These men were prophets. Although Rochester was small and insignificant then compared with its present industrial and commercial development—they had the business experience and acumen to foretell the coming increase in

our population. They foresaw the rapid influx of a cosmopolitan population crowded in tenements and congested streets—the building of countless factories, great blocks of business structures, colossal department stores, office buildings, theatres and hotels each contaminating the air with the foul gases of smoking chimneys and the health impairing effluvia of a vast sewage system to say nothing of the impurities arising from streets laden with mud and manure.

The opposition to the park system was not confined to the general public,—it was expressed by the officials and the Common Council. No encouragement whatever was given by the municipal government at the outset of the park commissioners' efforts.

Under such conditions the reader may readily realize the disheartening difficulties the commissioners had to contend against in selecting the most desirable lands and putting them in condition for park purposes.

The legislative act of 1888 was entitled "An Act to authorize the selection, location and acquiring of certain grounds for public parks and parkways in and near the City of Rochester and to provide for the maintenance and embellishment thereof."

The first section of the Act reads:

William C. Barrv, Henry Bartholomay, James H. Brown, John Ewing Durand, George W. Elliott, James S. Graham, Halbert S. Greenleaf, John Greenwood, James W. Gillis, Henry F. Huntington, Joseph Cauffman, William S. Kimball, Matthias Kondolf, Bernard J. McQuaid, Edward M. Moore, George H. Newell, Daniel W. Powers, Mortimer F. Reynolds, Hiram W. Sibley, William Sec and Alfred Wright are hereby appointed commissioners of the parks, parkways and approaches thereto which may be created pursuant to the provisions of the Act with the name and style of commissioners.

The said Park Commissioners shall hold office for the term of five years from the first of May 1888 and until others



Swimming Pool, Seneca Park