

Historic Parks

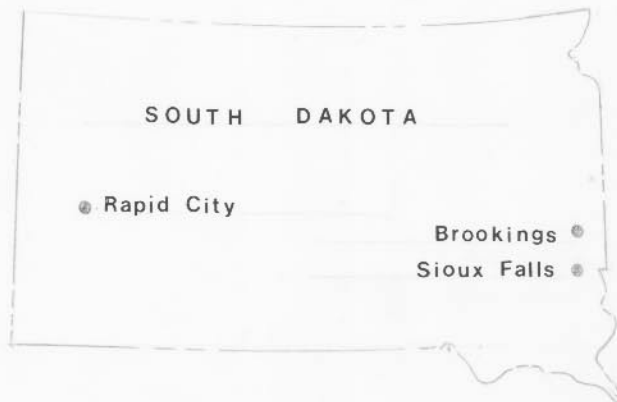
Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Brookings

South Dakota



Historic Parks

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Prepared By:

Wyss Incorporated
Landscape Architecture, Planning
522 Seventh Street - Suite 214
Rapid City, South Dakota 57701

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General Description

For the purpose of this report "historic parks" are defined as any parcel of land acquired or developed prior to 1940 by a city governing body. The cut-off date of 1940 was chosen for a number of reasons. Primarily, this provides for inclusion in this study all parks that may be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places until 1990. This also provides for the study of all parks constructed in these communities by the Work Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930's.

Public parks that may be eligible to the National Register for Historic Places must meet basic criteria for evaluation. The criteria are designed to guide agencies in evaluating potential entries to the National Register and cover such items as: 1) association with significant historic events; 2) association with significant historic persons; 3) embody distinctive characteristics; and 4) yield information important to history. Detailed criteria are available in the pamphlet entitled, "The National Register" (APO 1975-211-308/20), published by the U. S. Department of Interior.

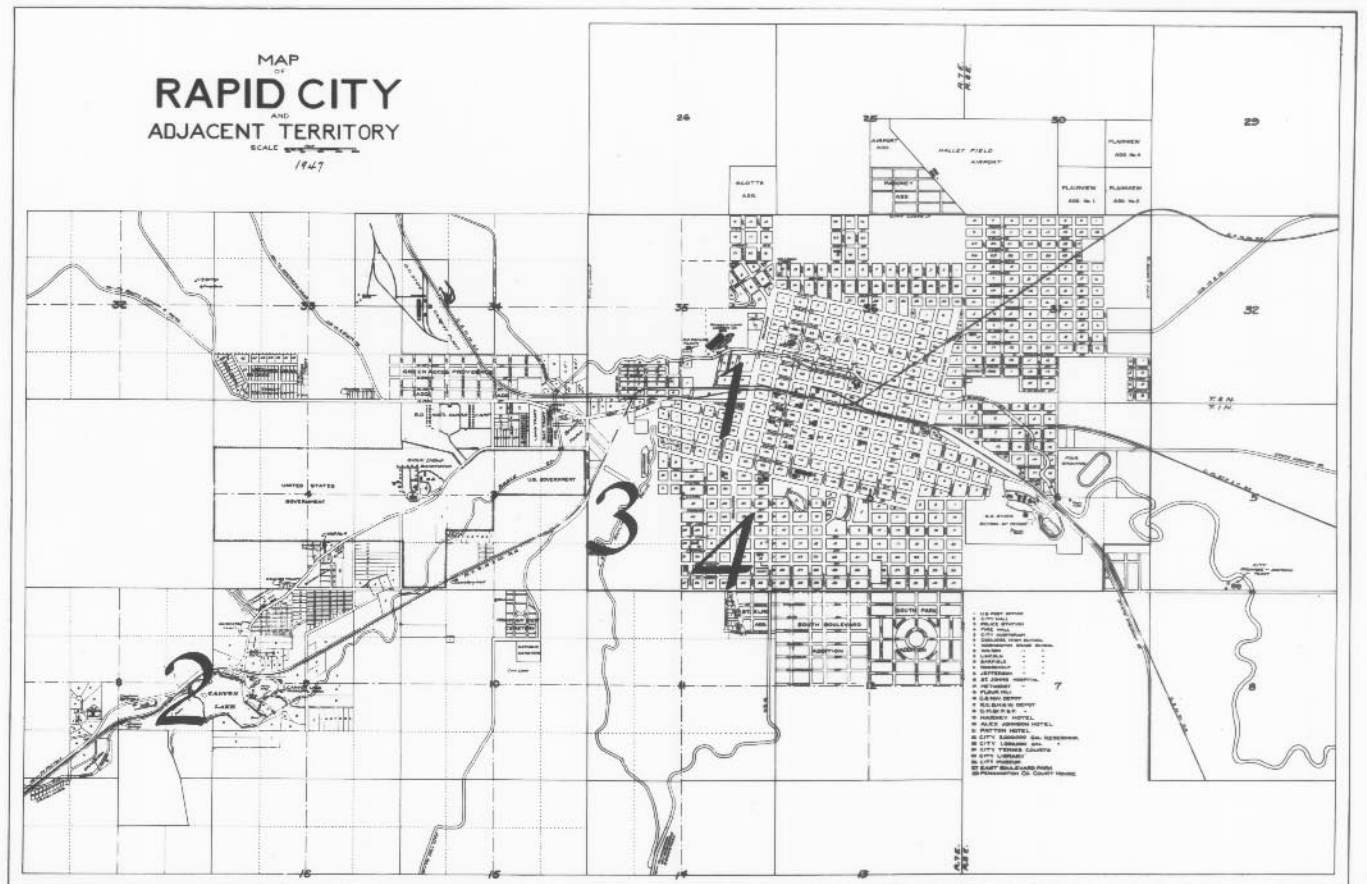
The historic parks reviewed in this report developed as individual neighborhood parks and were not developed as part of an overall park system plan. Each park was developed out of vocalized community desire for a park, or desire for a particular use (ice skating, baseball, etc.) accommodated by a park. In some cases, prominent local citizens promoted the need for a park and donated parcels of land for use as public parks.

Some of the historic parks were designed on site, some by the various park superintendents, and some by professional designers. Charles Ramsdell, landscape designer, residing in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was involved in designing at least two parks in Sioux Falls and one park in Brookings during the early 1900's. Mr. Ramsdell is supposed to have worked on his own, became a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1955, and died in 1957. The plans by Mr. Ramsdell included in this report are currently the only known records of his work.

In many cases the historic parks were constructed with assistance from the WPA. The WPA provided a large labor pool readily available for public works projects. In particular, excellent examples of stone masonry remain in the historic parks constructed by the WPA. Stone such as quartzite in Sioux Falls and flagstone in Rapid City was inexpensive to obtain and labor intensive to install, an ideal combination for the WPA.

The historic parks in Brookings, Rapid City and Sioux Falls provide open spaces that function extremely well for a variety of uses. In all cases the historic parks are now part of a larger community park system. Preservation of the historic integrity of these parks while accommodating contemporary uses is the challenge at hand.

Historic Rapid City Parks



- 1947 Map of Rapid City
#1 - Halley Park
#2 - Canyon Lake Park
#3 - Dinosaur Park
#4 - Wilson Park

History

Rapid City has a history of park acquisition and development that dates back to the late 1800's. A city park, now known as Thomson Park, appears on a 1889 map of Rapid City.

Rapid City Parks Superintendents have played a major role in the success of the park system. Leslie Kiel became the first Park Superintendent in 1936 after serving as Streets and Parks Superintendent from 1924. Mr. Kiel prepared the plans for East Boulevard Park, Wilson Park, Halley Park and Roosevelt Park.

In June of 1956, Mr. Merle Gunderson became the second Rapid City Parks Superintendent. Previously Mr. Gunderson was director of the South Dakota State University Horticultural Gardens and Greenhouses. During his 5 years as Superintendent, Mr. Gunderson developed Sioux Park, College Park, Robbinsdale Park, Storybook Island, and additions to Roosevelt Park and the Sioux Indian Museum.

From 1959 to the present, Mr. Bill Noordermeer has served as Park Superintendent. During this time the major addition to the park system

has been the Rapid Creek Floodway Park Development. This Floodway Park, part of which contains historic parks, provides protection from a 100 year flood level, and includes a bicycle path, an 18-hole golf course, numerous neighborhood parks, and outdoor sports facilities.

Public parks in Rapid City have evolved over the past 100 years from individual neighborhood parks to an integrated park system encompassing over 1500 acres of land.



Halley Park

Halley Park

Origin. Size, Location:

Originally Halley Park was just west of the City limits, bounded by West Main Street, St. Joseph Street, and West Boulevard. Halley Park is the first developed public park in Rapid City and consists of approximately 4.5 acres. The land was partially sold and partially donated to the City in 1915 and developed as an ice skating rink.

Unique Characteristics:

Halley Park contains many unique historic facilities and is a very important landmark to Rapid City. The Indian and Pioneer Museum, constructed in 1936, is the focal point of Halley Park. The museum is constructed from large stone blocks, first used in the demolished Lincoln School. The Minnilusa Historic Society promoted the project, and construction was accomplished with WPA crewmen. The museum is the WPA project #112.

The oldest known structure in Rapid City is also located in Halley Park. This structure, a log cabin, was built in 1876 by Rufus A. Madison and relocated to Halley Park in 1926. "The time is coming when... a log cabin will be a curiosity even in this section and unknown to the next

generation."³ The Fort Nightly Club of Rapid City made all arrangements for preserving this log cabin and beared all costs of moving it to the present location.

In August of 1935 an estimated crowd of 5,000 persons witnessed the dedication of elaborate rose gardens in Halley Park. These rose gardens received wide attention from the visiting public, especially after given three pages in the 1942 "American Rose Annual," the yearbook of the American Rose Society. The Cosmopolitan Club of Rapid City sponsored the Halley Park rose gardens.

Significant Individuals:

James Halley, pioneer banker of Rapid City and a public spirited person, was the founder of Halley Park. Mr. Halley sold one-half of the land to the City for \$3,065 and he and his partner, Mr. R. C. Lake, deeded the remainder of the land to the City free of cost.

Mrs. J. B. Gossage, Mrs. C. E. Gray, and Mrs. Haxby were very active in the Fort Nightly Club and spearheaded the preservation of the 1876 log cabin.

Major Renovations:

Until 1935 trees and lawn were the only landscaping in Halley Park. In 1935 the Cosmopolitan Club sponsored the elaborate rose gardens and rose arbors that received national attention in 1942.

³ Mrs. J. B. Gossage from The Daily Journal, February 26, 1926.

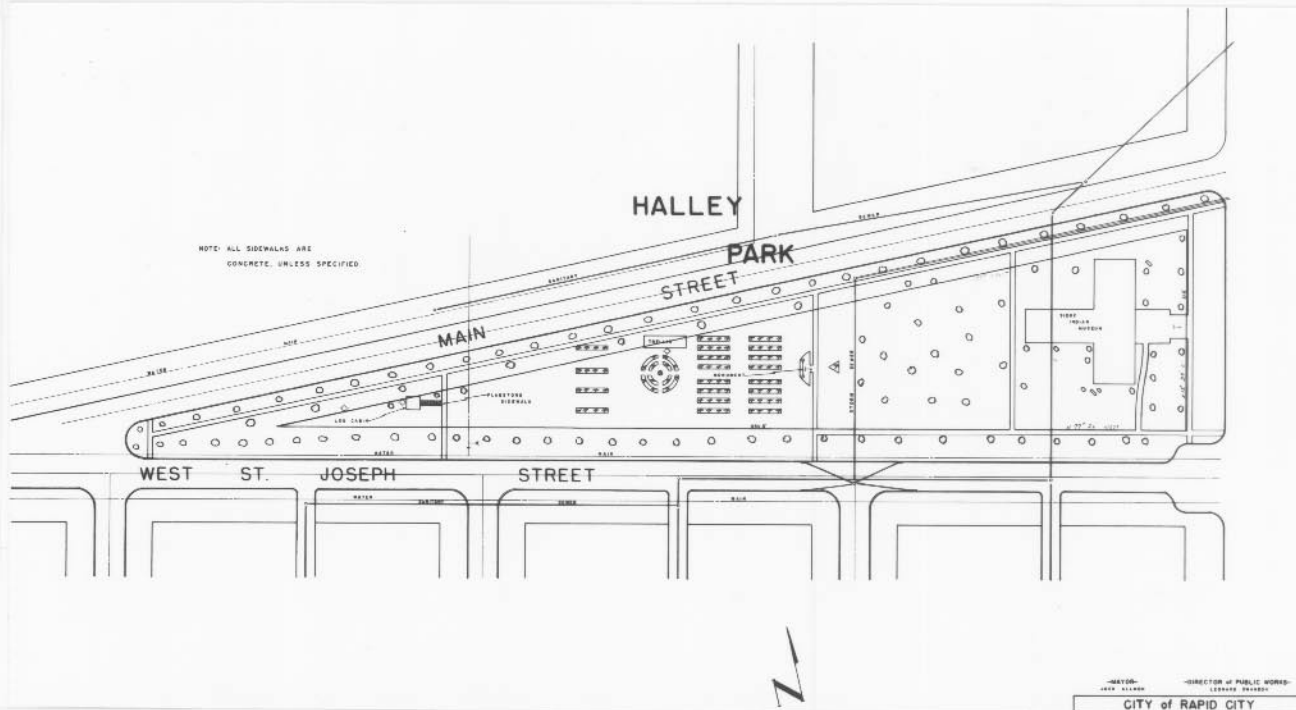
In 1936, the Pioneer Museum was constructed by WPA crewmen. A major addition to the museum was constructed in the late 1950's with prison labor and stone from the City quarry. The addition is now used for the Pioneer Museum and the original portion of the building is used for the Sioux Indian Museum.

In the mid-1970's, Main Street and St. Joseph Street were widened and in the process approximately 8 feet were removed from 2 sides of Halley Park. All existing trees, though, were left intact. At this same time, the landscaped boulevard along the east side of Halley Park was removed also to accommodate vehicular traffic.

Recommendations:

Halley Park should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Halley Park is the oldest developed park in Rapid City and contains the oldest known structure in Rapid City. The park, and facilities in the park, may be eligible to the National Register because of historic persons and events associated with the park and because of distinctive construction characteristics.

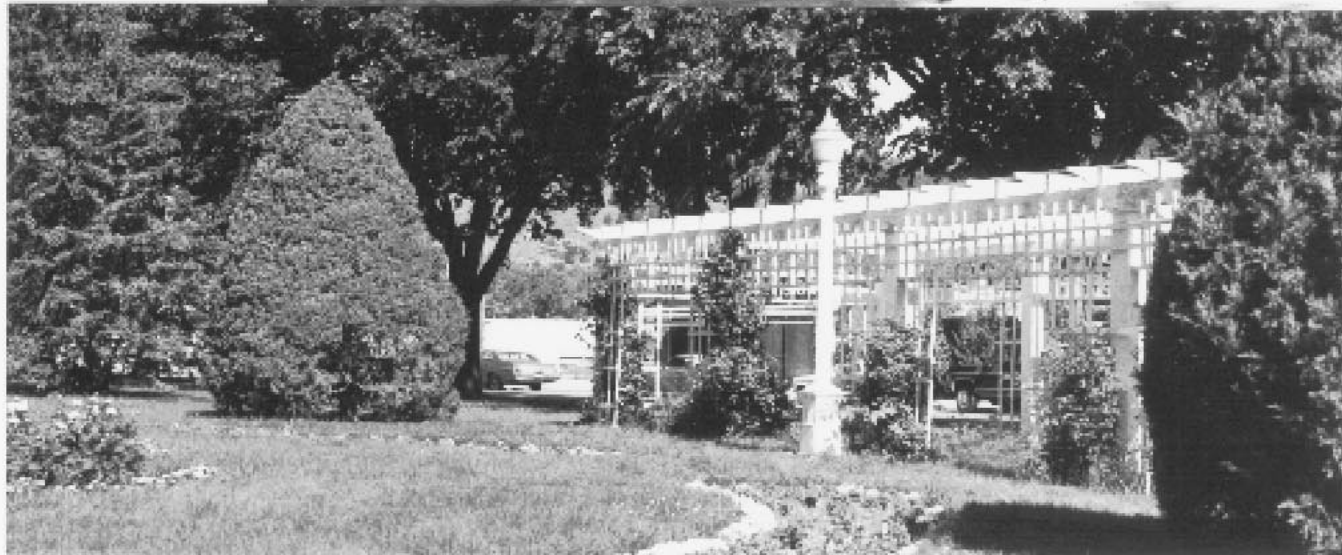
In addition, further encroachment of Halley Park due to vehicular requirements should be discouraged.



Plan of Halley Park, scale 1" = 200'.



Upper - Original site of Halley Park as shown in the late 1800's.
Lower - Log cabin as shown at original location, prior to being moved to Halley Park.



*Upper - Entry to the Indian and Pioneer Museums in Halley Park.
Lower - Formal gardens and rose trellis in Halley Park.*