

West 7th/Fort Road Federation

974 West 7th Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102


651-298-5599
FortRoadFederation.org

November 21, 2016

Mike Hahn
St. Paul Department of Parks & Recreation
City Hall Annex
25 West 4th St. Suite 400
St. Paul, MN. 55102

Dear Mr. Hahn,
The West Seventh/Fort Road Federation would like to request time on the St. Paul Parks Commission's December 2016 meeting. At the Federation's November meeting the board passed a resolution for a name change of Victoria Park. Please inform the Federation when this will be on the agenda.

Regards,


Betty Moran

cc: Alice Messer

incl



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November 14, 2016

Resolution

Quarry Farm Park

Whereas, the West 7th/Fort Road Federation has been promoting the development of the former Texaco Tank located at Shepard Road, Otto and West 7th/Fort Road since 1995, and

Whereas, the development was initially named River Bluff, and then was named Victoria Park by Brighton Development Corporation, and

Whereas the Federation began working closely with St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department in 2012 to develop a Master Park plan for the site, and

Whereas, during this period of work it was determined that the name Victoria Park was an inappropriate name for the park, and

Whereas, the Federation held various meetings to select a new name and determined that Quarry Farm Park better described the historic context of the land within the community and city,

Therefore, be it resolved that the St. Paul Parks Commission formally adopt the name of Quarry Farm Park for this site.

Finding a Fitting Name for a Future Park

By Gary Brueggemann

Someday in the near future a lovely new nature park will be developed along the river bluff in-between Otto Avenue and Montreal Circle, on the site that for most of the 20th Century was marked by rows of obtrusive oil tanks. Tentatively called "Victoria Park", after the Victoria Park housing complex built during the last decade on the east end of the old oil tank property, around the west end of South Victoria Street, the future park will soon receive a permanent name.

Several neighbors have criticized the name "Victoria" as not being truly identifiable to the West Seventh Street Neighborhood in general, or that special part of the neighborhood in particular. Named for Queen Victoria of England (reign:1837-1901), Victoria Street is clearly a city wide street traversing through several neighborhoods and even extending beyond Saint Paul's northern border into suburbia. Aside from that Street, the name "Victoria" has no direct connection to the part of the city where the park is located.

But what would be a suitable name for the new park? Perhaps a fitting name might be found by reviewing the unique history of the 35 acre site.

The first recorded residents of the site were frontier farmers James D. and Mary Ann Williams, who in 1850 – only a year after Minnesota became a territory and two years after the wilderness surrounding the town site of Saint Paul was surveyed – pioneered the land west of the survey line that became Otto Avenue, on the east end of Section 14. James, or "J.D.", born in Missouri in 1822, and Mary Ann, born in Illinois in 1833, were newlyweds when they started carving out their farm just a half mile up river from Fountain Cave – the celebrated natural landmark where Pierre "Pig's Eye " Parrant, "the founder of Saint Paul", built his first saloon in June, 1838. Inside their new cabin, sometime in 1851,

Mary gave birth to their first child, Stephen – the first baby born between Fountain Cave and the lake that pioneer Thomas Crosby claimed and named in 1858. Four more children followed in comfortable succession: Anna (1853), John (1856), Mary Ellen (1860) and Florilla (1864).

Together the steadily growing family was able to create an impressive 60 acre farm that ultimately included four horses, two cows, two calves, eleven sheep, two pigs, and a 180 bushel potato garden, a hayfield which yielded six tons of hay a year and a good producing wheat field. According to an 1866 inventory, the Williams' owned a \$300 threshing machine, two \$10 cultivators, a \$125 mower, a \$35 raker, two \$100 farm wagons, one \$25 cutter, an "old" \$10 buggy and a plow valued at zero. Beginning in 1857 their income was supplemented by Williams' river ferrying service. "Williams Ferry" ran from his river front property below the bluff marked by present-day Otto Avenue, to what is now the Lilydale boat launch, across the river. The Minnesota Legislature fixed the rates for ferrying at 10 cents for each foot passenger, 15 cents for each mule or horse, 25 cents for a horse or ox team, 25 cents for a single horse carriage, two cents for each pig or sheep, 10 cents per barrel, 50 cents per 1,000 feet of lumber, and three cents per 100 pounds of articles. How much money "Williams' Ferry" made is unknown but by 1857 there were a number of farmers who homesteaded west of his land that may have given him some business.

The Williams' nearest neighbors were Louis and Mary Taible -- a couple of German immigrants from Prussia and their four American- born children: Elizabeth, Martin, Casper and Ferdinand – who settled just west of the Williams' about 1854. By 1860 they had a productive 40 acre dairy farm that at least partly covered the west end of the future park.

Interestingly, Williams and all the pioneers west of Randolph Avenue had settled on the land before they had legal title to it. Legal title would only be obtained when they purchased their land at the federal land auction held at Stillwater, on September 11, 1854. In anticipation of that auction and

concerned that speculators might outbid them for their land, Williams and other settlers held an "open air [meeting] on the grass about where [the old] Omaha shops [were] built" (around present-day Watson and Drake Streets) and organized a Claim Association, in which J.D. Williams was elected Secretary. The end result was that all members of the association were able, thanks to their collective strength and their ability to physically intimidate other bidders, to buy their land at the minimum price of \$1.25 an acre.

The story of Williams' farm and ferry ends in tragedy. On November 7, 1866, J.D. loaded his wheat harvest into his wagon and rode over to Minneapolis, where he sold it for cash. On his return home, somewhere "on the prairie between Minneapolis and Bloomington", Williams was accosted by ax-wielding highway bandits, who robbed him of both his money and his life. Williams' butchered body, which the bandits dumped into his wagon, was soon discovered when his team of horses trotted toward home on their own. The murderers were never caught and their identities still remain a mystery.

Four years after Williams' death, the southwest part of his land became Martin Delaney's "Union Stockyards" – "the first regular stockyards in the city or state". Covering five acres of land near where railroad tracks were expected to be laid, the stockyards included a slaughter house capable of slaughtering 20 head of cattle a day and a brick hotel built in 1875. The owner-developer of this enterprise was Martin Delaney, "a large man standing six feet in his stockings", who was born in Ireland in 1828 and moved from New York to Saint Paul in 1853. After briefly working as a butcher at Fort Snelling, he "built the first exclusive meat market in the city" on Fort Road and Eagle Street and then in 1870 started his stockyards.

No doubt, one of the farmers who sold him cattle was his nearest neighbor, William Von der Weyer (Weir), the new owner of the Taible farm, who rented five acres of his land to Delaney's son, Edward, and who was recorded selling five cows and five calves in 1879. Despite its size, the Von der

Weyer farm was quite productive. In 1880 its five cows produced 750 pounds of butter, its 50 chickens produced 600 dozen eggs, its one acre of corn produced 70 bushels, its 9 acres of potatoes produced 600 bushels and its 15 apple trees produced one bushel. Born in Prussia in 1825, Von der Weyer was one of the organizers of St. Francis de Sales German Catholic Church in 1884 and served as its first treasurer. His banker son Henry, who lived next to the church, at 416 Daly Street, was one of the founders of the old West End Commercial Club at the site of today's McDonald's.

In 1896 all the old farms and stockyard property between Otto Avenue and today's Montreal Way was transformed into a massive stone quarry by Jacob Lauer. Born in the German section of Alsace Lorraine in 1856, Jacob was the younger brother of Henry and Charles Lauer – founders of the renowned Lauer Brother Construction Company. Jacob and his three sons, Louis, William and George quarried limestone at the site until Jacob died at his home at 252 Erie Street on August 18, 1916. The quarry was continued by George Lauer until 1928 when the extensively excavated land was sold to the "Wood River Oil Tank Company", later taken over by Shell Oil.

Finding a Fitting Name for a Future Park

Part Two

By Gary Brueggemann

Last month I detailed the recorded history of that special 35 acre piece of local river bluff between Otto Avenue and Montreal Way that is now scheduled to become a nature park and playground. The name of that new park has yet to be selected, and it was the intent of my historical review to offer some potential name choices that are reflective of the parkland's actual history.

Here is a quick summary of the park site's interesting history:

Beginning in 1850 and continuing to about 1896, the site was predominantly the domain of family farmers. The first to farm there were American pioneers, James D. and Mary Ann Williams, who also added a ferry boat river crossing service in 1857, which "J.D." ran until his death by homicide in 1866. Two German immigrant families, Louis and Mary Taible and William VonderWeyer, were also known to farm on the site.

In 1870 Irishman Martin Delaney converted five acres of the site; about 400 yards west of the present-day corner of Stewart and Otto Avenues, into Saint Paul's first stockyard, and then five years later built an adjoining hotel there.

In 1896 Jacob Lauer, the youngest brother of the Lauer Brothers Construction Company, transformed the stockyard and surrounding farm land into an immense limestone quarry. The quarry was worked until 1928, when the first of many oil tanks were erected on the extensively excavated grounds.

In short, a few farms, a ferry service, a stockyard, a hotel, a stone quarry and an extensive concentration of oil tanks concisely summarizes the recorded history of the site.

What wasn't recorded was the use, if any, the local Native Americans (the Mdewakanton Dakota) – who used no written language – had for the site. Despite decades of searching, this researcher found no evidence suggesting that the site or any part of the land that is now the West Seventh Street Neighborhood held any special significance to the local Dakota. The *known* sacred sites of the local Dakota were all either downriver or upriver from today's West Seventh Street Neighborhood.

Downriver there were at least six special sites within the present-day city limits of Saint Paul: "Imnainjaska" (White Rock), the name the Dakota gave to the dominant exposed sandstone bluff, on top of which the town of Saint Paul began; "Wakon-teebee" -the "dwelling House of the Spirit" (Carver's Cave), in present-day Dayton's Bluff; the sacred, ancient burial mounds, where modern Mounds Park now preserves the six remaining ones; present-day Phalen Creek and Swede Hollow Park, the beginning of the old trail (dating back to at least 1680) that the Dakota used to walk from the Mississippi to present-day Lake Mille Lacs ("Mde-wakon"- Spirit Lake); present-day Pig's Eye Lake, the first recorded site of "Kapoja"(Kaposia), or Little Crow's village, where from the late 18th Century until 1837 stood the bark lodges of close to 300 Dakota people; (in 1837 the band moved directly across the river near what is now the corner of Butler and Concord Streets, in South Saint Paul, where their new village remained until 1853;)and Battle Creek (which flows into Pig's Eye Lake),which was the site of the historic 1842 "Battle of Kaposia", when an invading band of Ojibwe attacked Little Crow's band and ultimately killed 19 Dakota.

Upriver there were several more Dakota places, some of them shrouded in spiritual significance – like "Mdote" (Mendota), "the meeting of waters", where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers meet, and "Owamniyomni" (St. Anthony Falls) -- but none of the known ones were located in present-day Saint

Paul. For all we know maybe there were some special Dakota sites in the land that is now the West Seventh Street Neighborhood. But if that was so, it is too bad one of the explorers, fur traders, missionaries, soldiers or frontiersmen, who were in that Upper Mississippi land back in the days of Little Crow's Kapoja village, didn't bother to report it. Interestingly, the one well-known and widely reported local natural landmark, Fountain Cave, located at the site of today's Archer Daniels-Midland grain elevator, in the heart of our neighborhood, was only known to the Dakota a few years before Major Stephen Long discovered it in 1817. That might be evidence that our little stretch of the river was not that frequented by the Dakota.

Given the rich recorded history of the park site, perhaps it is best to concentrate on what we know actually happened on that 35 acre tract; and in that regard we are lucky we have enough records to piece together a 150 year history of the place. What wasn't covered before was whether there are any surviving legacies of the site's early history? The evidence is strong that the still existing old, narrow road that runs down the bluff to the river, just south of the little railroad bridge, was the actual road that J.D. Williams carved out in the 1850s for his ferry service. Though the road was later paved in the 20th Century so trucks could reach the river, the road's width and grade down the hill was most likely the work of pioneer J.D. Williams. Incidentally, in 1857 his ferry was one of only four river crossing services from Fort Snelling to the Lower Landing at Jackson Street. (Saint Paul's first bridge across the river was built at Wabasha Street in 1858.)

A short distance from the top of "Ferry Hill Road", on the west side, in an area now covered by summer brush, are the probable ruins of Martin Delaney's old stockyard hotel. More research is needed to absolutely verify it, but those foundation stones are very close to where an 1886 plat map locates the site of Delaney's stockyard and hotel.

One other surviving legacy, that may be easily over looked, is a road we still use today and people have used continuously for over 150 years: Stewart Avenue. Although modern Stewart Ave. ends at Otto Avenue, (and then re-emerges again about a mile west), it originally crossed over Otto (the City's western border from 1872-1885) right through the future park site. Part of that old Stewart Avenue followed the route of an even older road: the old frontier oxcart trail from the Fort Snelling Ferry, directly across the river from the fort, to Saint Paul. This was the original "Fort Road" that was later largely re-routed and then fully graded into a more direct five mile route to Saint Paul. In 1883 it was re-named West Seventh Street.

One of the mysteries of the park site are the origins of the man-made caves dug from the side of the ferry road bluff that as far back as the 1940s were called, "Seven Heavens"(the origin of that name is another mystery). More research is needed to uncover the true history of those caves.

Unfortunately, no visible traces of the farms that once dominated the landscape can now be seen on the park site; but we should always remember that the site began not as an urban development, but as rural farmland. In honor of the park's pioneer history, three apt names have been suggested: "Pioneer Park", "Ferry Hill Park" and "Fort Road Park".