
SECTION II • DATA COLLECTION

A PARK HISTORY

The following narrative is provided by the Jackson County Parks and Recreation Department and the Greater Jackson Chamber of Commerce, and summarizes the history of Cascade Falls.

1. Birth and History of a Landmark

More than any other structure in Jackson, Cascade Falls is the monument of beauty and distinction that has been a source of enjoyment and fond memories to millions of visitors over half a century.

Cascade Falls is the result of a man's dream to do something for the people of Jackson and to build an attraction that would provide visitors with a positive impression of the city. That man was William Sparks.

Sparks moved to Jackson from Burrington, England, in 1882 at the age of 9. He graduated from Jackson High School and attended Delvin Business College. At 14, he started working in a grocery store, putting in 14-hour days with an ambitious determination to advance his business career. At 20, he married Matilda Peters and they had two sons.

Sparks joined Phillip and Winthrop Withington in the formation of the Sparks-Withington Company in 1900. The company made buggy parts and began with only a dozen employees. Sparks-Withington soon became involved in the manufacturing of parts for the fledgling automobile industry. By 1929, the company employed over 7,000 people, marketing a variety of products, including the "Spartan Radio and Horn."

William Sparks' civic dedication was evident by the fact that he was elected to three terms as Jackson's mayor; served as president of the Greater Jackson Chamber of Commerce; and was actively involved in numerous civic/service groups, including the Boy Scouts. He also organized the Zouaves, a famous drill team known for their cadence (300 steps per minute) marching with regulation Enfield rifles. It was as commander of this group that he earned the nickname "Captain." The Jackson Zouaves performed throughout the world, and it was during a visit to Barcelona, Spain, that he formed the idea for Cascade Falls from a fountain he saw there.

Directly west of the Sparks home, which was located at the current intersection of West Avenue and Kibby Road, were acres of swampy bog land. Mr. Sparks' original plan was to acquire the property and convert it into a skating pond. His dream began to grow, and soon his plans called for the development of over 400 acres, complete with a championship golf course; lagoons; canal; toboggan slides; landscaped grounds; picnic areas; a clubhouse, which is now the Cascades Manor House; and Cascade Falls!

The William and Matilda Sparks Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization, was begun in the fall of 1929. The original trustees were William and Matilda Sparks, and their two sons, Harry and Clifford. The purpose of the foundation was to develop the land into a recreation area and meditation center.

After extensive tests by engineers with a 10-foot experimental scale model, specifications were outlined and a contract was awarded to the North-Moller Construction Company on October 17, 1931. North-Moller was to perform nearly all the work on Cascade Falls, except electrical wiring and installation. The contract required that the job be completed by April 26, 1932, that Jackson labor be used, and that married men be shown preference. Work continued on schedule throughout the winter, and Cascade Falls opened to a crowd of 25,000 people on May 9, 1932, Captain Sparks' 59th birthday.

Cascade Falls is 500 feet in length, a vertical height of 64 feet, and a total width of 60 feet. There are 6 fountains, 16 falls (11 are illuminated), 1,230 colored electric lights, and a 2,000 gallon per minute water pump that filters, chlorinates, and recycles water in a closed loop system. There are 126 steps along each side of Cascade Falls. This walkway passes 3 main pools of water that are 30 feet by 90 feet.



Guy C. Core describes the Cascade Falls premiere: "As gloom of dusk thickened, water splashed down concrete falls into reflecting pools. Powerful lights flashed on, and the colorful, fast-changing spectacle drew gasps of admiration from the assembled throng."

In the years that followed, word of the Cascade Falls' spectacle spread throughout the country and around the world. Visitors from all points of the globe came to Jackson to view Cascade Falls.

Shortly after William Sparks' death in 1943, the entire 465-acre Park was given to Jackson County.

With time, Cascade Falls fell into a state of disrepair, and by 1969, the entire landmark was threatened with permanent closure. Vandals had destroyed many of the concrete posts, the fountain, and boulevard lights. The massive reinforced concrete structure was scarred with graffiti and began crumbling. In order to reverse the destruction of this landmark, a "Save the Cascades" program was created with the goal of restoring Cascade Falls to its original grandeur. The community response was overwhelming, and within a year, Cascade Falls was reopened.



2. Renovations

The original "Save the Cascades" campaign occurred during 1969-1970. The Cascade Falls Amphitheater was built and the grounds enclosed to protect Cascade Falls from vandalism. School children collected pennies to help the renovations.

New computerized lighting systems and new sound systems were installed as a result of the "Cascades Rebirth" from 1982-1983. In addition, the "Buy A Seat" campaign bought new stadium seats for the Cascade Falls Amphitheater in 1985. There are currently 1,491 stadium seats along with benches that will accommodate 360 people. For special events, additional seating is available to allow for 3,000 persons to watch a show.

During 1992-1993, the most ambitious Cascade Falls renovation project was initiated. Extensive concrete repairs were made; and new walkways, and a new filtered and chlorinated well water system were installed. All light sockets were also replaced and rewired.

The most recent renovation was in 1998-1999. The outdated lighting, fountain controls, and fountain pumps were replaced with state-of-the-art, high-speed controls. A computer now operates the system.



Figure 2: Existing Conditions

B THE PARK TODAY

Serving as the largest county park, the Park can be defined as both a regional and community park that draws users from throughout the county and region. Over the last several decades, a variety of active and passive recreation facilities were added, creating a multi-use park that provides recreational opportunities to all age groups. The Park additions that can be attributed to a community park designation include: jogging trails and boardwalks, benches, playgrounds, picnic shelter, putt-putt golf course, batting cages, driving range, tennis courts, basketball court, horseshoes, ice cream concessions building, restrooms, a bandshell for summer performances, maintenance building, landscaping, and parking throughout the Park.



Regional significance goes beyond Cascade Falls and has been expanded upon through the development of a multi-field little league baseball complex and additional programming. The most noteworthy programming includes: the Civil War Muster, Memorial and Labor Day fireworks and special July 3rd fireworks, and a variety of special events including concerts and holiday celebrations.



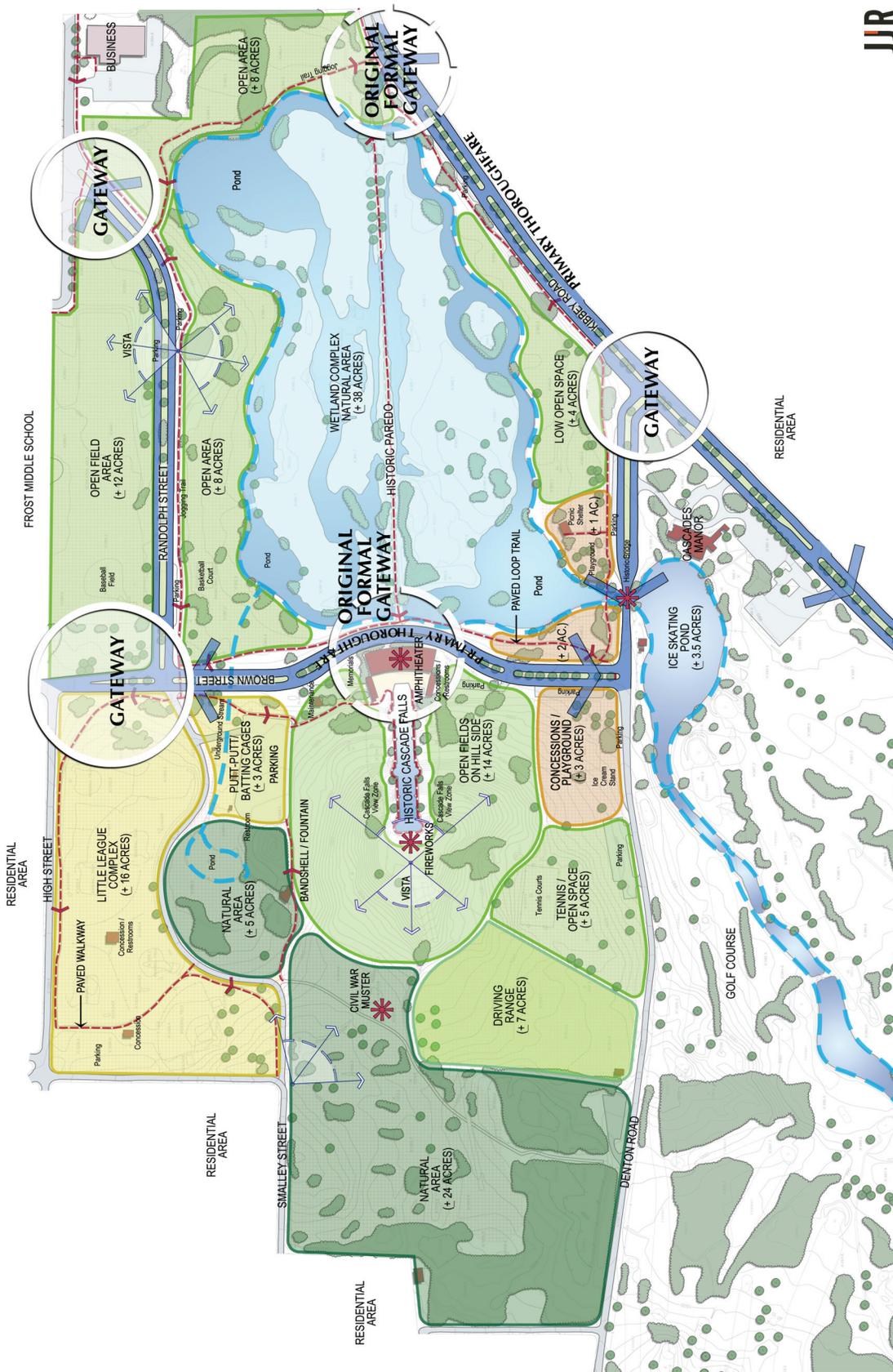


Figure 3: Site Analysis