

Eagle Point Park: The Legend and The Lodge

Elijah Buell, the first settler of Lyons, owned 88 acres of land. On October 11, 1888, he sold the land to the owners of the Clinton and Lyons Railway, David and William Joyce. (Coincidentally, both David and William are buried near the park boundaries and a monument was built in their memory.) The 88 acres of land was then called Joyce's Park. Under the new ownership, mule-drawn cars ran on a narrow-gauge rail from Main Street to the park.

On December 1, 1891, the Clinton Street Railway changed to electric driven cars and found it necessary to enlarge its tracks. Since there was no entrance to the park except by rail, the company ran an eight-mile line to the park in 1902. Admittance was free but there was a five-cent fare to ride the rail car.

Soon after, Joyce's Park was enlarged and used year round. There were four built pavilions without water service, but a great deal of amusement equipment was provided, as well as free movies in the evenings. Dances, with several hundred people in attendance, were held on a regular basis. In 1913, the railway spent a great deal of money on enlarging the rail line and the main pavilion. It is said that there was a discovery of a dead tree, located where the North Path reached the old well and a wild eagle had made its nest. From this point onward Joyce's Park became known as Eagle Point Park. George and Milton Kramer donated a 700-pound statue of an eagle valued at \$11,000.

By the 1920s the demand for cars in the park was so great, that at significant cost, the Railway Company was forced to finally allow cars. Leo Hannaher believed to be the first salaried superintendent of Clinton Parks and Ward W. Cook, the Park Board Commissioner, conceived the idea of a road around the park in the late 1920s. They walked ahead of a tractor with a plow directing a farmer to make a "Serpentine Drive". The Serpentine Drive was constructed for only \$700. In 1925, the Street Car Company sold the park to the City for \$22,500. The deed was finally received from this great bargain in 1937. The Board of Park Commissioners, which was created by mandate of the citizens in 1900, accepted Eagle Point Park under its realm of responsibility.

When the depression struck Clinton in 1933-34, the Clinton Board of Park Commissioners immediately took advantage of Work Progress Administration funds. WPA funds were given by the Federal Government to states in order to employ people during the depression. The program was the biggest relief program, in U.S. history, used for direct relief of the unemployed. Literally, hundreds of people worked to improve the park for \$15 a week. Three million in WPA funds went into beautifying Eagle Point Park. The stone tower, limestone footbridge, many trails and miles of walks were engineered with the funds, including the legendary 'Thousand Steps'. Artifacts dating back to 200-600 B.C. were found in the park during this building period. Also in 1934, WPA workman built the present lodge structure around the original 1930 rustic shelter. The present structure became known as "The Lodge".

Construction of Lock and Dam #13 began in 1938. The dam created a 4 by 7 mile pool named "Lake Clinton," creating the widest part of the entire Mississippi River. In 1958, a parking lot and Lookout Point were built on the cliff, 200 feet above the river, overlooking Lake Clinton, the Mississippi and the state of Illinois. Binoculars have been installed at this location, notably the most scenic point in the entire park.

As time evolved, the Recreation Commission formed in 1946 to provide activities for the citizens, yet be an autonomous group from the Board of Park Commissioners. In 1951, ten acres was purchased known as the Au property. In 1961 thirty-four acres, referred to as the Shadduck property, was acquired. When Highway 67 construction created the need for the sale

of a small portion of park land, to the Iowa Highway Commission, of thirty acres. Known as the Holm property, was obtained on the south end of the park with the monies received from the Highway Commission. To this day, this area is being kept in its natural state complete with nature trails laid out by what is now the Soaring Eagles Nature Society. In 1967, the Park Board and Recreation Commission consolidated efforts into the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Department is the responsible organization for the activities and upkeep of the park to this day. Additional acreage has been added to the park over time. Presently, there are 205 acres in the park.

As a historical note in 1962 on the acreage known as Shadduck property, several Indian burial mounds, thought to be Ceremonial Mounds, were discovered. It is believed that the tribe consisted of primitive farmers dating back to 600-1200 A.D.

History also tells of the Fox and Sac Indians worshipping Stone Face. This is a huge rock overlooking the river from one of the bluffs, holding the natural formation of a man's face. Legend tells of a ruthless Indian tribe from the Great Plains attempting a huge deer kill without consulting Stone Face. As they attempted to encircle the deer, a dark cloud appeared out of the west, causing a great wind that uprooted trees and dropped sheets of rain. Many of the ruthless red men were killed and the rest were frightened and fled. When Stone Face found they had left, the storm subsided. A band of Sacs came upon the dead, burying them, worshiping Stone Face, settling down to hunt and fish right here in the Gateway area.

There is also a story telling of a natural cave located in the bluffs that was large enough for several men and horses. The cave was used by horse thieves and counterfeiters which was appropriately named Robbers Cave. The entrance to the cave has settled and it is no longer safe to enter.

Improvements to the "Lodge" structure have also occurred over time. In 1959, a concession stand was built by the remodeling of an original section. In 1967, the entire building was renovated and remodeled as a summertime gathering place. A significant change was yet to come.

In late 1996, an idea sprang forth that eventually led to the 'Symphony of Lights' during the holiday season of 1997. Due to the high level of success of that event, "The Lodge" needed to be upgraded and improved for "winter-time" use. Prior to the beginning of the 1998, Symphony of Lights event, "The Lodge" was transformed into a year-round facility by relocating the water lines to below the frost level, adding insulation in the walls and ceiling, electrical rewiring of the entire building and installation of three heating plants. The years 1999 - 2000, several other upgrades have been made with lighting and a house public address system among others, truly making the building a "gem" of a facility.

In 2007, Clinton was named an 'Iowa Great Place'. This lead to the creation of a disc golf course, in the northern most part of the park, just south of the Equestrian Center. This 18-hole course has quickly become another jewel in the park seeing disc golf enthusiasts from around the Midwest and receiving accolades from the disc golf community.

To celebrate their 100th year, the Clinton Rotary Club was looking for a large project—the Legacy Project. A one million dollar enhancement of Eagle Point Lodge, through donated funding in 2015, began in January 2016. The renovations include veranda extension, front entrance restoration, the main hall, kitchen and restrooms upgrades and the additions of a meeting and bridal changing room. The Eagle Point Lodge is a piece of Clinton, which ties it to the river and its rich lumber history, making it the crown jewel of our area.