

# Cedar Lake Park

UPDATE

Spring/Summer 2005

Trail Builders Edition

Volume 17, No. 1

*130 Years of Building Rails and Trails...*

## The Ongoing Story of the Cedar Lake Regional Trail

BY NEIL TREMBLEY

One of the great trail builders in American history was James J. Hill. His story is inextricably bound to creation of the Twin Cities as a major metropolis. But did you know about his connection to the Cedar Lake Regional Trail? In the 1870s, Hill gained control of a nearly bankrupt railroad originally called the St. Paul and Pacific. A decade later he began to change the face of Cedar Lake.

Originally, the railroad corridor bee-lined straight west out of downtown Minneapolis until it reached Cedar Lake. Then it swung down the eastern shore of the lake (where the Kenilworth Corridor is now) before heading west again. The reason for the detour was that the northern part of the lake lapped against the base of the Bryn Mawr bluff, and past that barrier there was a ridge (dividing Cedar from Brownie Lake). The combination of the shallow bay and the ridge dissuaded earlier railroad men from trying to build through there. But it didn't deter Hill.

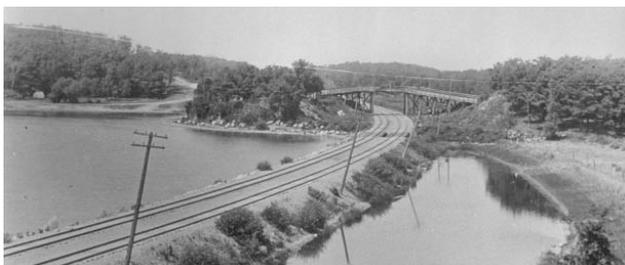
He believed that the fastest route was always the best, and in 1886 he directed his surveyors to

*Rails and Trails, to 6*



Trail builders from Lake Harriet School celebrated Earth Day April 21 by rebuilding and re-chipping trails in the park.

## An Historic Look at Cedar Lake's North Shore and Bridge



View of Cedar Lake's north shore and Great Northern tracks in 1900, with original Cedar Lake Pkwy bridge in background. (Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)



2002 Gathering: Friends and neighbors of Cedar Lake Park gathered to celebrate the old bridge before it was demolished.

See new bridge photos on page 7.



# On the Horizon

BY KEITH PRUSSING, CLPA PRESIDENT

There is a scientist in Japan who has been studying water molecules for 40 years. He has taken photos of the crystals that water forms as it freezes. He discovered that his thoughts and emotions influenced the nature of the ice.

He found that positive, focused intent created stronger, more cohesive ice, while diffuse or negative intention resulted in ice that looked different, and was more brittle. The conclusion is that our intention shapes our world.

I think that Cedar Lake Park and the Regional Trail is a wonderful example. Our process over the last 17 years has been very intentional. I think that the park and trail continue to organize very nicely.



**Atoms spin, DNA twists, plants unfurl, planets orbit, galaxies rotate. Spiral motion is fundamental to the universe.**

There are many things on the horizon. Completion of the CLRT to the river is growing closer, and a multi-modal transportation study is underway so that Northstar commuter rail, light rail, Amtrak, and the Cedar Lake Trail can exist harmoniously in the same corridor.

The proposed Twins stadium abuts the trail, and we are in these discussions. There will be a national Rails to Trails conference in late July that will showcase the park and trail.

In the park the native landscape restoration at 21st St. and Thomas Ave. S. will see the prairie component burned and seeded. The Mound project and the spirals of the memorial cedar grove are moving forward.

We will continue our outreach efforts with entry into the blog world, an electronic bulletin board, and enhancements to our website.

Your continued support is appreciated.



# Gifts

BY DAN DAILEY, TREASURER

Without your continuing support, the extraordinary accomplishments at Cedar Lake Park would not be possible. The Cedar Lake Park Association gratefully acknowledges the following individuals for their generous contributions in the form of cash, stocks, in-kind donations, and memorial gifts —as well as volunteer time. Since the last Cedar Lake Park Update, contributions have been received from:

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Give online at [www.cedarlakepark.org/support.html](http://www.cedarlakepark.org/support.html)

## CLPA Media Update

CLPA is exploring ways to communicate more effectively. Internet tools under consideration are a bulletin board, a blog, an email tree, a trail issues database, and interactive web site features. Our web site priority list also includes content that will enhance the site's capacity to serve the wider community. Please contact us if you have ideas, information or expertise to share!



If you would like an electronic version of this newsletter, drop us an email at [info@cedarlakepark.org](mailto:info@cedarlakepark.org)

# About the Cedar Lake Park Association

In 1988, neighbors came together out of concern for a tract of land on the north and east sides of Cedar Lake in Minneapolis. The land was being vacated and sold by Burlington Northern Railroad. The area was targeted for residential development. Instead, these citizens offered another vision; "To establish a nature park in the heart of the city, with connecting greenways in all directions."

The Cedar Lake Park Association developed a unique, consensus-driven model, with the following mission:

- **Create and nurture** a park at Cedar Lake with a thriving nature preserve and connecting trails and greenways.
- **Provide** opportunities for people to learn to live in community with nature and one another.
- **Continue** to foster citizen leadership and private involvement in the development and management of the park and trails.
- **Support** similar efforts throughout the metro area and beyond.

The asking price for the 47 acres, one mile from downtown Minneapolis, was \$1.8 million. A partnership was begun with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. An educational effort began throughout the community that resulted in donations of over \$700,000 from private citizens, businesses, and civic organizations. The state legislature was approached, and appropriated the balance. The property was deeded to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board in their largest land acquisition since the early 20th century.



**Canada rye, a prairie grass.**  
(Photo courtesy of Don Beimborn)

MPRB convened a series of citizen advisory committees charged with developing a statement of philosophy, design principles and a concept master plan to guide the future design of the park and the Cedar Lake Trail. The results of this process were the Cedar Lake Park Concept Master Plan, accepted by MPRB in June 1997, and the design and construction of the nationally award-winning Cedar Lake Trail, completed in 1996.

Today, over 17 years later, the Association continues to implement this mission. Two Conservation Partners state grants and other private and public monies have been used by volunteers of all ages and ethnicities to plant hundreds of native trees, shrubs and wildflowers, and remove non-native invasives. The Cedar Lake Regional Trail passes through 35 acres of restored prairie grasslands, and is used daily by over 1,500 cyclists, walkers,

rollerbladers and wheelchairs. Other connecting trails have been developed, and a final three-block link to the Mississippi River through downtown Minneapolis is close to reality.

The Cedar Lake Park Association continues to be an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. Individuals, neighborhoods, clubs and businesses contribute generously in the form of money, labor, supplies and services each year. Youth groups from schools, churches, temples and scout troops do volunteer native landscape restoration activities in the park and along the trail.

The Association participates in Earth Day, the City of Lakes Loppet and the Jones-Harrison Stroll and Roll. It maintains active and fruitful liaisons with all levels of government. It has published this newsletter, the Cedar Lake Park Update, now in its 17th year. It maintains a website at [www.cedarlakepark.org](http://www.cedarlakepark.org).

CLPA has been and continues to be an outstanding example of citizen initiative. The consensus model of participation has demonstrated that it can produce results in unique and creative ways. It brings together diverse public and private groups around a particular issue, and solutions are created that nurture nature and enhance the public good.

National publications have mentioned the Cedar Lake Park and Trail as prime reasons why the Twin Cities are in the highest tier of metropolitan areas for fitness and a high quality of life. The ongoing work and stewardship of the Cedar Lake Park Association is dedicated to continuing to evolve.

*This article was developed to nominate CLPA for a Governor's Award of Excellence.*

## The Majesty of the Mound



The highest point on the north shore of Cedar Lake, the mound offers a magnificent view of the lake. This area presents an exciting challenge to remove buckthorn and other exotics, rework the access trails to the summit, and plant with native forbs, shrubs and trees. CLPA hopes to begin this project in 2005.

## 21st St. & Thomas Ave.



Volunteers from Lake Harriet School get briefed for a hands-on Earth Day at Cedar Lake and along the Kenilworth Trail.

(Photo by Keith Prussing)



**T**here is a search underway for a statue that reportedly was lost in Cedar Lake. The story is that in 1972, after a football game between Benilde-St. Margaret and DeLaSalle high schools, the statue was stolen from Benilde. It was taken to Cedar Lake and placed in a canoe. Somewhere along the way to Hidden Beach, the canoe capsized, and the statue sank to the bottom. A local diving club is convinced that this is a real story, and has been searching the lake, so far without success. If you know anything about this statue, please contact CLPA.

**The eastern ends of the park prairies were burned earlier this spring.**

This activity is part of the prairie management program that is utilized by MPRB to maintain and improve prairie restorations throughout the park system. Typically it takes place in the early spring or late fall, and occurs in a cycle of two to four years. There would be no prairies without fire, as shrubs and trees would gradually encroach. MPRB Environmental Operations staff conducts the burnings, and can be contacted to learn more about scheduled burns.

The prairie restoration component at 21st and Thomas will be burned as soon as the wet weather ends enough to allow it to dry out. This area, in the Kenilworth corridor along the trail, will be disced and seeded with prairie grasses and wildflowers. It will take three years of attention before the new prairie will be established. This work will be done by veteran prairie restorers PRI, Inc., assisted by CLPA volunteers. Donations of time, money and materials are welcome.

**With the arrival of warmer weather, the level of bike activity throughout the park has greatly increased.** Biking is a legitimate activity when it occurs on the paved trails and in certain designated areas.

Otherwise, it leads to a degraded landscape with trails cut in inappropriate places, and conflicts with pedestrians, wildlife and other park users. Further, an MPRB ordinance allows for bike use *only* in authorized areas. Efforts have been underway for many years to contain this problem, and to educate bikers and enlist their cooperation. Volunteers continue to remove buckthorn, and use the downed material to close trails and create habitat. This strategy works on more marginal trails; bikers will



remove the materials if the route is important to them. We are working with MPRB and the Minnesota Off-road Cycling Association (MOCA) to protect the park, and develop environmentally-friendly trails where appropriate. A new sanctioned off-road biking area has opened in Wirth Park near the par three golf course.

**There is good news at Anwatin Woods.** The developer's options have lapsed, and the community group is raising funds and awareness to purchase this land next to Wirth Park. The plan is to develop an Environmental Education Center in conjunction with Minneapolis Public Schools that would be a learning laboratory for the entire system. The property is adjacent to Anwatin Middle School in Bryn Mawr. Go to [www.saveanwatinwoods.org](http://www.saveanwatinwoods.org) for more information.

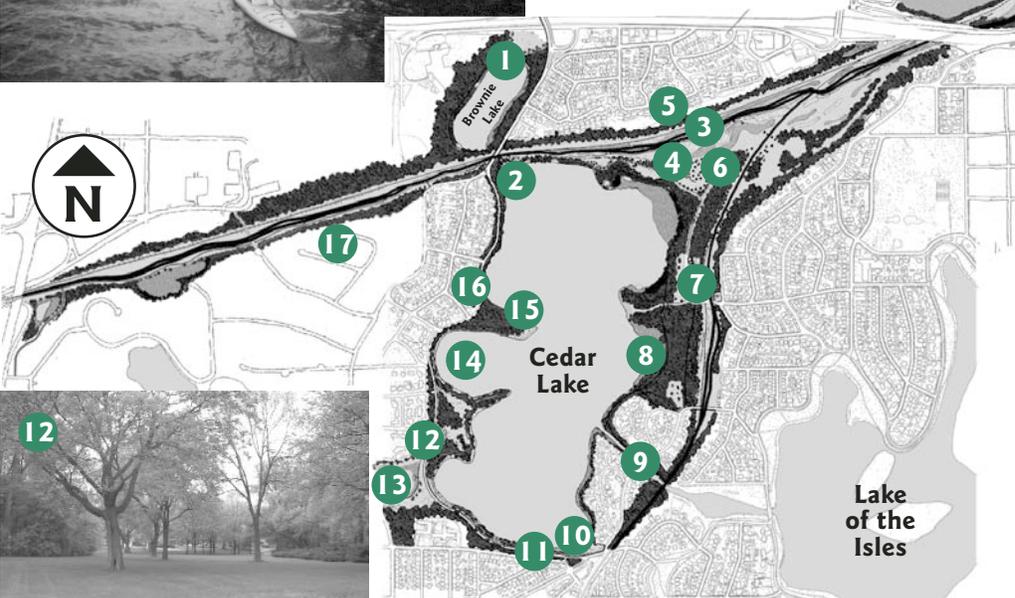
**There are several studies continuing in the CLRT corridor.** Hennepin County is conducting a multi-modal transportation analysis for the area between Washington Ave. and Glenwood Ave. They are looking to make sure that the Northstar Commuter Rail project, light rail, Amtrak, freight rail, and the CLRT fit together well. A station to serve all of these transit modalities will be sited somewhere in this area. Just west is located the site of the proposed Twins baseball stadium. The city and county are negotiating with the developers to ensure the best possible design for this small site. It is possible that the CLRT will travel on a ramp across the site, and be seen as an amenity for the fans and the ballpark. Finally, the Southwest Corridor study continues, and has recommended several possibilities for light-rail routing, including a station somewhere near W. 21st St., and another near Penn Ave. S./I-394. CLPA is participating in all of these studies and negotiations to ensure that our interest is included.

**A prairie transect will be taking place later this summer.** CLPA has contracted to conduct a scientific analysis of the composition of our prairies to determine what plants are present. This will measure prairie health and vitality, determine the success of our ongoing plantings, and help guide future restoration efforts.



*Projects in the Park, to page 6*

# and Cedar Lake Park and Trail



## Key to locations

- 1 Brownie Lake
- 2 Kayak near Brownie tunnel
- 3 Prairie edge path
- 4 Sunset bench
- 5 Prairie and the city
- 6 Cedar Grove
- 7 Woodland path
- 8 Linda's spiral
- 9 Canoe in Isles/Cedar canal
- 10 South Beach
- 11 St. David's Society daffodils
- 12 Picnic lawn
- 13 Cedar Meadows
- 14 Fishing
- 15 Dock at Cedar Point
- 16 A view from the western shore
- 17 Western Extension, looking west

## Rails and Trails, from 1

plot a course right through the top of Cedar Lake. He smashed through the ridge (where the Brownie Bridge is now) and spread its remnants to create the causeway through the northern edge of the lake (see photo). This was trail building!

Over the next 100 years, the lake was lowered (by over 12 feet), and the entire northern part of the lake was filled in with cinder from the wood-burning locomotives. This area became a huge switchyard in the early 1900s. But consolidation of the railroads made the switchyard obsolete, and it was dismantled in the early 1980s. With remarkable speed, nature turned the land north of Cedar Lake from an abandoned switchyard to a prairie. It was during that time builders with a new vision changed the face of Cedar Lake yet again.

In 1991, the Cedar Lake Park Association led the way in purchasing the old switchyard site, and helping to broker one of the Minneapolis Park Board's largest land acquisitions in the last half of the twentieth century. An integral part of the group's vision was building a trail through the park, the first segment of which was built in 1995.

The trail was meant to be a conduit. The goal was to connect the western suburbs to the heart the city, from the lakes to the Mississippi River through downtown Minneapolis, and ultimately transform Hill's original vision into a people's trail stretching from coast to coast.

Much has been accomplished. Three trails now connect with the Cedar Lake Regional Trail, and plans are set for construction of the next segment of the trail from the present trail-



**The photo on the left looks east along the railroad causeway across Cedar Lake constructed by James J. Hill in 1886. It replaced the earlier, longer causeway through the eastern lakeshore and wetlands. Both sets of tracks continue to be used. Notice that the lake originally came to the tracks; today, the shore is hundreds of feet to the south. The right-hand photo shows the present day park and trail, with Hidden Beach and Lake Calhoun in the background.**

head on 7th Street to the Washington Avenue Bridge in 2006. What's left?

Plenty!

Blazing the trail the final three blocks from Washington Avenue to the Mississippi River may prove to be the most daunting feat of all—one worthy of the great James J. Hill himself. Acquiring the right-of-way through this part of the corridor and descending from the bluff overlooking the river to the North Mississippi

Corridor 30 feet below are just two of the challenges that lie ahead. There are plans for light and heavy rail, as well as plans for a sports stadium in the area. None of these challenges is insurmountable.

With the example of James J. Hill and the vision of the founders of the Cedar Lake Park Association, we will find a way. We will make this happen. We will build this trail.

## Projects in the Park, from 4

**The hot weather has brought many more people to the beaches** at Cedar Lake in search of relief. Hidden Beach is quite active, and largely under control. The scene continues to be a social laboratory where people from all walks of life come together to have fun in a balanced, healthy way. The excesses of the past are greatly diminished, and the beach is watched by users, neighbors, and the police to ensure that it stays a safe place.

**We have never seen such quantities of milfoil throughout the lake.** The water quality continues to be high, but the experience for swimmers, boaters and fishers is compromised. Due to budget constraints, MPRB will do little if any milfoil harvesting this

summer. Exotics such as milfoil and buckthorn are examples of a larger problem taking place throughout our world. Please be careful with your boats and canoes to remove any materials, pull buckthorn, garlic mustard or motherwort, and don't plant exotics at your house. We can never go back to the purity of earlier days, but we can prevent our native landscapes from being overrun.

There was little snow this winter, and the temperatures were erratic. **The Loppet cross-country ski course through the park was in great shape one week before the race.** The Minneapolis Schools Championship race was held, marking the first race in the park.

Then came the great meltdown, with temps eventually reaching the middle 50s under bright sunshine. Hundreds of volunteers worked heroically all week, hauling and shoveling snow to spread on the 35K course from Wirth Park to Uptown. However, it was not to be, and the course was lost. The race weekend was a great success regardless, and we learned that we could survive anything. This spring meetings have been held to consider how to make the course, a 14-foot wide corridor, have less impact in the area of the Eloise Butler Wildflower gardens and in Cedar Lake Park.

# Birds Enjoy Nesting Boxes

BY BARB AND KURT KLUSSENDORF

Last year we fledged a lucky 13 bluebird young and 15+ tree swallows. This year our bluebird nest boxes awaited their return. The bluebirds returned by mid-March and laid their first brood of eggs by late April.

Eastern bluebirds and tree swallows go together. They have very similar nesting requirements and so compete for nest sites. That's why nest boxes are placed as a pair. The swallows will often occupy one box, but then prevent other swallows from using the neighboring box. So it stays available for bluebirds! The swallows may even defend both boxes. Getting dive-bombed by swallows takes a little getting used to.

Both species are colored on top, but swallows are far darker blue on back and very clean white in front. Bluebirds are dusty blue on back and show rusty tones at the top of a white breast. An easy way to tell them apart is that swallows hunt for bugs on the



Photo by Dorene Scriven

wing, making them aerobic wonders. Bluebirds generally search for bugs on the ground from a perch and drop down to snatch one when they see them. You may see our boxes along the Cedar Lake Trail. There are two pairs north and east of Cedar Lake.

Another pair is north of Brownie Lake and a new set is just northeast of 394 and Wirth Parkway. Take a minute to see how your migrating neighbors are settling in.

Mary McGee reported April 25 that two pairs of eastern bluebirds are nesting along the Cedar Lake bike trail on the north end of the lake and that wood ducks are also nesting in the area.



Photo by Vivian Mason

Send us your news or photos of wildlife in Cedar Lake Park.



The new Cedar Lake Parkway bridge. (Photos above and below by Don Beimborn)



CLP friends at the new bridge in 2005. (Photo by Kurt Waltenbaugh)



A train runs beneath the new bridge, next to the Cedar Lake Regional Trail.

A break in the weather allowed a group to gather on Sunday, May 15, 2005, to celebrate the opening of the new Cedar Lake Parkway Bridge. Members of the Cedar Lake Park Association (CLPA) along with several nominees for the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board donned festive yellow shirts and posed for photos to commemorate the construction of the new bridge spanning the railroad tracks between Cedar and Brownie Lakes.

## St. Louis Park City Council Approves Trail Access Ramp

BY DAN STEINBERG

On June 6th, 2005, the St. Louis Park City Council passed a bill to build an access ramp from the Cedar Lake Road pedestrian bridge near the Jewish Community Center to Cedar Lake Park. This ramp will be built south of the railroad tracks. The time frame calls for construction to begin September 2005. (I think it is more likely to be built in 2006.)

I want to say thank you to everybody out there for support on the issue. This has been a long time coming. I do ask that we do everything possible to use the ramp to the trail and avoid going through the Lake Forest community. Please encourage others to do the same.



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*Cedar Lake Park Update* is published seasonally by the Cedar Lake Park Association (CLPA).

Since 1989, CLPA has worked with individuals, neighborhoods, corporations, foundations, churches and schools, as well as with state, regional and federal agencies.

We have successful partnerships with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and other city, county, regional, state and federal agencies.

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## CLPA Update, Spring/Summer 2005

*If you're seeing this CLPA Update for the first time, contact us if you want to be added to our mailing list.*

## CALENDAR

### CLPA Steering Committee

Second Monday of each month, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Kenwood Recreation Center. You're invited to participate.

### Rails to Trails Conference

July 27-30, [www.railtrails.org/traillink2005](http://www.railtrails.org/traillink2005)

### Eighth Annual Fall Wildflower Planting in the Prairie

September 16

### Autumnal Equinox

September 20

### Bird Migrations

Mid-Sept./early Dec.

## Your support is important!

*Come to the park, enjoy its beauty, become a steward. Other ways to help:*

- Volunteer your time and talents
- Donate goods or services
- Coordinate a group or sponsor an event
- Donate financial resources, such as cash, stocks, or bonds
- Leave a legacy by including a bequest in your estate planning, or purchase a memorial or honorarium for a loved one

**Donate online ([www.cedarlakepark.org](http://www.cedarlakepark.org))**

*All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*



## Ice Out of Cedar Lake

The ice leaves Cedar Lake April 5, 2005.

## Cedar Lake Park Association Mission

- 1. Create and nurture a park at Cedar Lake with a thriving nature preserve and connecting trails and greenways.**
- 2. Provide opportunities for people to learn to live in community with nature and one another**
- 3. Continue to foster citizen leadership and private involvement in the development and management of the park and trails.**
- 4. Support similar efforts throughout the metro area and beyond.**