

-Gregory Square Timeline-

HISTORY: Gregory Square, a park-like beauty spot near the center of Brainerd, was once a huge stand of stately virgin Norway and Jack Pine surrounded by a wooden fence. Please enjoy this timeline and your visit to this wonderful park! This compilation will provide many historical photos, the THEN part of a *Then & Now* theme. YOU need to provide the NOW images! Take lots of photos so this timeline can be accurately updated in another 100 years!

1871: When the plat of Brainerd was filed for record, a **center square** was left from subdivision and marked "reserved." This area became Gregory Square. It was named from the middle name of John Gregory Smith, the first president of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Although the square was not designated as a park per se, someone must have felt that Brainerd should have one. It was a dense pine forest, four square blocks in size. To become a park, it would be necessary to develop the area, put in some sort of lighting, construct paths, and maintain and patrol the area.

As Brainerd grew, the beauty of the area must have been recognized as houses were built surrounding it and pioneer citizens requested the city council to cut paths through the forest.

1872: **Charles N. Parker** comes to Brainerd on a business visit.

1882: **C. F. Kindred** erects a bandstand **in the exact center**, as well as a drinking fountain. No photo has yet surfaced.

1885: Feb.: Paths are cut through the forest of Norway and Jack pines.

-April: C.N. Parker moves to town, later to be called "Brainerd's Grand Old Man."

-May: Early citizens were showing park consciousness. The question of ownership arose. If the Lake Superior and Puget Sound Company, which was platting townships, selling lots, and locating industries along the new railroad claimed ownership, it would be their job to take care of the area. However, the company might decide to subdivide the square city lots. This possibility abhorred many early inhabitants. The city council then went on record claiming the area was owned by the city. The city attorney investigated title and in June was instructed to bring suit, if necessary, in order to establish city ownership.

1887: While the suit was still on, **a fence was built** to enclose the area. It was built by White & White, a 2-board fence capped with a flat-top board enclosing the entire park. It had swing gates at the corners.

1891: May 18: LS & PS Co. proposes a compromise offering to deed half of the square to the city. The offer is refused by the Council.

1892: A long legal battle with suit started in the United States Circuit Court. Through the efforts of the city attorney, W. S. McClenahan, on Jan. 25, 1892 the Circuit Court decreed ownership to the city of Brainerd. Citizens petition requesting the appointment of a Park Commissioner to supervise the cleaning and improvement of the park. They also wanted a bicycle path built around the exterior, but inside the fence and made of cinder.

-Jan. 25: City now calls the Square **Gregory PARK.**

1894: Fence repaired.

1898: Catastrophe struck Gregory Square on June 2, 1898, when a **tornado or cyclone** swept through the magnificent pine in the Square. This was followed by the necessary clearing and cleaning.

1899: The council authorized \$200 for plantings.

1900: Another \$100 was added. **Box elders and poplars** replaced the majestic pines and the **old bandstand was removed** (to just east of the depot, then later to “Hobo Park”).

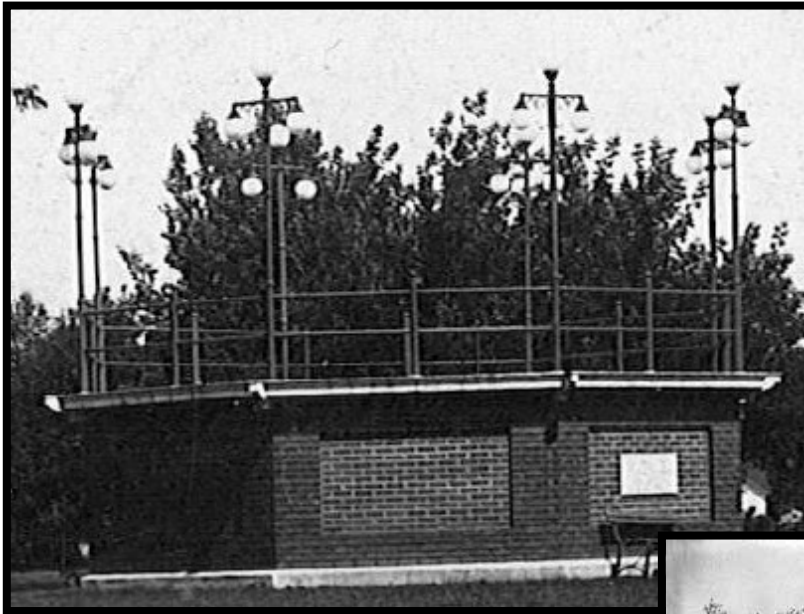
1909: Under the Home Rule Charter, the Park Board with S. R. Adair as chairman authorized improvements to Gregory Square. A **concrete wading basin** with a fountain was built and encircled with a **vine-covered pergola**. Trees were trimmed and **cinder paths** were laid. For several years, the **wading basin** was used as a goldfish pond. Ca. **1907 image** from a postcard; one of 3 pergolas on the left:



Ca. 1910 view of the 3 pergolas, the view looking north:

1911: C. N. Parker dies.

1912: A year after his death and as a memorial to Charles N. Parker, one of the Brainerd pioneers, a **new bandstand** was built in the park, the gift of the Parker family. 1914 image below:



-1930: Cornelius "Con" O'Brien Sr., donated the money to erect a **cut-stone gateway** to be designed by landscape artists and to be placed on 6th Street.

1940/6/21: Brainerd Daily Dispatch: "Featuring shallow but mirroring pools divided by a rustic log bridge, an elaborate Japanese rock garden is proposed as a major phase in the

beautification of Gregory Park. It would be flanked by flowers and shrubs and an array of elm, ash, maple and other trees." See the image on the next page.

1942/8/14: This area was filled in after the death of a child in the body of water in 1942. Not much is known of this little pond or why it was created, but it may have been a wet area to start with as you can still see old cedar trees in the area around the basketball court. Or, were they planted in 1940?



Brainerd Daily Dispatch: "Marjorie (Wayne) Tautges, 3-year-old daughter of Mr. & Mrs. W. A. Tautges, 504 N. 4th St., was drowned this noon in the small rock garden pool in Gregory Park. Firemen and police with an inhalator used carbogen in an attempt to restore life in the child but failed after more than an hour of work."

1945: Some citizens propose the north half of the park to be **converted into building lots**.

1959/6/24: Brainerd Daily Dispatch: “Gail Wallace, 7, daughter of the Jim Wallaces of N. 5th Street, had a narrow escape from drowning in Gregory Park. A lagoon surrounded by bushes had filled with water from the recent thaw. Gail was playing and fell in up to her neck. Fortunately, two boys heard her screams and pulled her out.” It is not known if this is the same “lagoon” as the rock garden mentioned in a newspaper article above, or the low area just SE of the bandstand that is still prone to light puddling to this day.

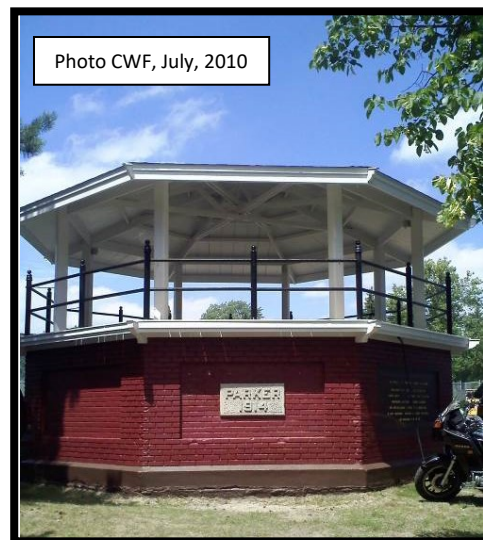
2014: The bandstand turns 100, and on Sat., June 16, the *Brainerd History Week* celebration honored the structure with a “Happy Birthday” song and wrap-around human “group hug”!



--- Happy Birthday, Parker Bandstand! ---

In 2010, a group of citizens led by the Lakes Area Senior Activity Center and Brainerd Lakes for a Lifetime, raised enough funds to restore the ailing Bandstand. Thanks to all that have helped and contributed to this worthy project. The bands are back!

Let's hope this wonderful structure lasts yet another 100 years.



2018/8/10: This year the **Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.)** took on a project to clean and restore all of their plaques they had placed in the state, and one was right here in this park. Note in the 12/23/2006 photo how the metal on the plaque was quite eroded over the years, just barely viewable. At the same time, the City of Brainerd Parks & Recreation Dept. decided to restore the two 1930 plaques on the stone arches. Now walk over to the south end of the park by the fountain, and see how they gleam today!

12/23/2006 images below. Compare them to the **RESTORED** items now, to be seen in the south end of the park:



You no doubt have noticed many new trees in the park. If you go the bandstand you can see memorial bricks affixed to the sides that tell you not only who donated a tree, but where it is located in the park! Find out more about this great reforestation program on the Parks & Recreation site below. Those great park benches, too, are all donated through the city park program. Check them out! **2005 image:**



<https://www.ci.brainerd.mn.us/363/Memorial-Trees-Benches>

The sign above the arch reads "Camp Spalding." Date unknown.



Crow Wing County Historical Society Collection

This compilation is courtesy of the Brainerd Dispatch/BrainerdHistory.com website, Jan Burton/Crow Wing County Historical Society, Carl Zapffe/"Brainerd 75"-1946, City of Brainerd Parks & Recreation/Tony Sailer, Ann M. Nelson, and many others who have researched the history of this wonderful park. **Thank you to LaVonne Danzl in 2020 for providing this kiosk to allow the history of Gregory Park...to be...**

...IN Gregory Park!