

Prentis Park
A Jewel in Vermillion, SD
1923-2023



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Cover image of the Prentis Park arch curtesy of the Clay County Historical Society

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Preface

In late fall of 2021 Susan Keith Gray, Chair of the Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission (VHPC), asked me to write a book about the history of Prentis Park for its centennial celebration. The VHPC members agreed with the project and placed ads to solicit additional information and memories about Prentis Park. In addition, the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission agreed to sponsor this activity. Constance Krueger kindly edited the book and I thank her for her suggestions that improved the narrative.

After getting permission to work on the project, I started to gather information about the development of the park and interviewed Dave Nelson and Jim Goblisch, Parks, and Recreation Directors for the last 46 years, and Jose' Dominguez, the City of Vermillion Engineer. I read books, and researched newspapers and issues of *Volante* at Archives and Special Collections at the University of South Dakota I. D. Weeks library. Archives at the Clay County Historical Society and W. H. Over Museum contained documents very useful for the book. In addition, thanks to Katie Redden, Financial office of the City of Vermillion, I perused the City Council Meeting Minutes starting with 1923, the year Charles Prentis donated the first 10 acres of land to the City of Vermillion until the 1970s.

Through various contacts, I gathered information about memories individuals had about Prentis Park. These memories were shared via emails, in-person interviews, or over the phone. The memories add context and depth to the narrative and am thankful to the individuals for their personal contributions.

What follows is a book in three sections. The first part consists of a timeline of the development and evolution of Prentis Park and includes the many people responsible for its creation, maintenance, and transformation over one hundred years. The introduction describes Vermillion in 1923-1930 when the park started and ends with changes made to the park over several decades until the present.

The second part depicts the utilization of park facilities by individuals and groups. The activities increased following the

construction of swimming pools, an outdoor amphitheater and bandshell, the Club 76/ girl scout cabin, shuffle courts, baseball fields, horseshoe courts, basketball courts, and disk golf stations. Open areas and picnic shelters facilitated community gatherings and family reunions. The Veteran's Monument, no longer at Prentis Park, was a focus of many Memorial Day celebrations.

The final section entitled "Memories" consists of thoughts and remembrances individuals had living in or around the park. Ole Anderson's grandchildren recalled memories they had of their grandfather the master mason who constructed the iconic bandshell. Not only did people share their memories, but they also shared artwork, photographs, brochures, and newspaper clippings. Attribution for their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

Thus, this book is about Prentis Park, a Jewel of Vermillion for one hundred years. The book is not only a history, but an evolving, living, and very personal narrative. It was an honor to work on this project. I sincerely thank all the individuals who so graciously donated time, images, knowledge about the park, and their memories to make the book come alive.

Abbreviations used:

Vermillion Plain Talk (VPT)

Dakota Republican (DR)

City Council Meeting Minutes (CCMM)

Please note when sections are quoted from publications or written by another individual, the text is presented in *italics*.

Introduction

To appreciate the importance of Prentis Park to the citizens of Vermillion when Charles Prentis deeded the first ten acres of land to the City of Vermillion, we need to first view Vermillion from a 1923 lens. In 1923 Vermillion had a population about 2600 people.¹ It had been 42 years since most of the city moved from the banks of the Vermillion and Missouri Rivers up onto the bluffs following the massive 1881 flood that destroyed three-quarters of the town. The University of South Dakota (USD), started in 1882 as the University of Dakota, had over 800 students in 1923, and boasted Schools of Law and Medicine, Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Music, and Engineering.²

Downtown business district buildings were predominately constructed of brick following a number of fires in the late 1890s. The new municipally owned light and power plant, located at the corner of Center and West National Streets, allowed many Vermillionites to utilize electricity in their homes and businesses. In 1923 Dr. Eugene Stansbury started the Vermillion Hospital located on Prospect Avenue and West National Street, prior to the construction of the first public Dakota Hospital in 1935.

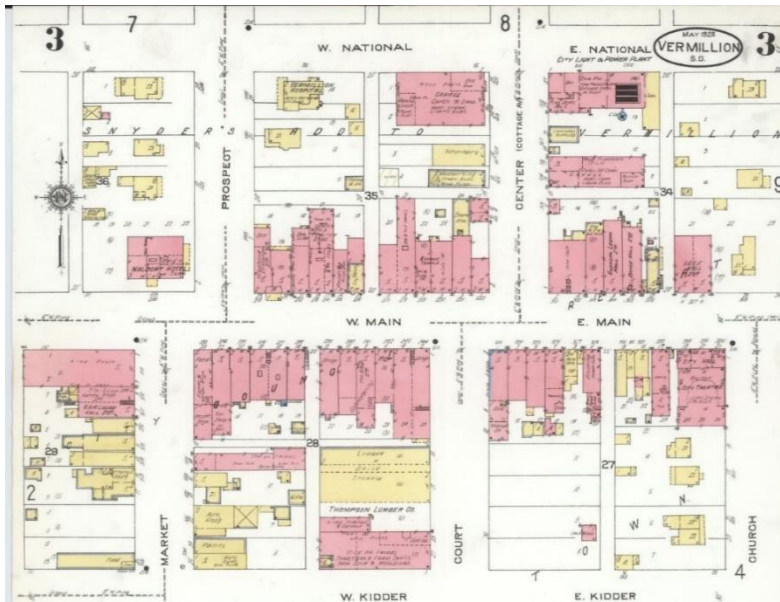
At the west end of the city on Main Street stood the impressive Clay County Courthouse constructed in 1913. The large Waldorf Hotel was located on West Main Street and Prospect Avenue. City Hall located on the corner of East Main Street and Church Street included a City Theatre. Vermillion churches consisted of St. Paul's Episcopal church, the First Baptist Church, the Congregational Church, Trinity Lutheran Church, and Saint Agnes Catholic Church. Vermillion had two Carnegie Libraries, one a public library located on Church Street, and the other a university library located on the southernmost portion of the USD campus on Clark Street.

The Mayor of Vermillion in the fall of 1923 was Dr. Carl Viers who went on to serve as mayor from 1923-1932. Dr. Viers was a veterinarian who had succeeded Mayor Martin Thompson, son of an early Vermillion

¹ United States. Work Projects Administration. South Dakota., University of South Dakota. (1942). Vermillion: a civic picture (a report on municipal government) W. P. A. municipal government research project. Vermillion: University of South Dakota. Page 5: Figure 1: Population of Vermillion 1860-1940.

² Cummins, Cedric. The University of South Dakota. 1862-1966. University of South Dakota, Vermillion (1975).

pioneer, Myron Thompson. Vermillion boasted two newspapers, the *Dakota Republican*, and the *Vermillion Plain Talk*.



Sanborn Fire map of downtown Vermillion in 1923. The pink indicates brick construction and yellow indicated a wood construction of a structure. (Library of Congress).

In 1921 a newly formed group, the Civic Council, joined several local groups composed predominantly of women, to improve the lives of Vermillionites. The Civic Council worked to develop parks, construct an open-air theatre on the USD campus, clean up the city, and conduct many beautification projects. To raise funds, the Civic Council had White Elephant sales and opened a store to sell donated items³.

Two parks existed in Vermillion in 1923, a six-acre park on the ravine road (Dakota Street) named Audubon Park and Austin Park developed from land Rachel Ross Austin donated to the city in 1893 as a memorial to her late husband Horace Austin. The park was not completed until 1905, after Rachel Austin passed away in 1904. It was located south of the fairgrounds bordered to the south by Clark Street, north Dartmouth Street, east High Street, and to the west by Washington Street. Currently Austin School occupies that land. The city also owned the fairgrounds and ran a popular municipal nine-hole golf course outside the city limits.

³ Schell, Herbert S. *Clay County: Chapters out of the Past. The Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce, Vermillion (1985), Pages 214-215.*

In 1930 Charles Edwin Prentis donated a second parcel of land to the city to enlarge Prentis Park for playing fields. At that time Vermillion's population consisted of 2,850 residents.

Even with Great Depression raging, USD and Vermillion constructed new buildings to meet the growing demands of students (almost double the number in 1923) and that of citizens. The campus boasted the New Armory (now the Neuharth Media Center), the Administration building (Slagle Hall) and the first Student Union (currently under renovation housing the Psychology Department). New programs at USD included the School of Business, College of Fine Arts, and the Graduate School.

During this time, construction in Vermillion included an addition to the First Baptist Church, the 3rd rendition of the Methodist Church and the 4th rendition of the Congregational Church. All three buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1929 the first municipal swimming pool was built in Prentis Park. Finally, in 1931 a new Vermillion Power Plant to increased demands for electricity was constructed below the bluff. Vermillion boasted many doctors, dentists, lawyers, merchants, and druggists. Both newspapers: *The Vermillion Plain Talk* and the *Dakota Republican* were viable in the 1930s.

Thus, Charles Edwin Prentis, an early Vermillion pioneer and businessman, saw a need to develop a public park. To facilitate the development of the park, he deeded the city two parcels of land each about ten acres: the first in 1923 and the second in 1930. Although the founding of Prentis Park occurred in 1923, it took several more years to make the park functional. Prentis Park, the oldest continuously utilized park in Vermillion, celebrates its centennial in 2023. This book was written in appreciation of this event.

Overview of the Book

Following this introduction, the book discusses the owners of the land that became Prentis Park. An appreciation of who Charles Prentis was follows. The book first describes seminal time periods when the park underwent substantial changes, and discusses how individuals, entities, and city government transformed the park. Next described are a variety of activities and events held in the park indicating the importance of Prentis Park to improve the lives of Vermillionites. The book ends with remembrances of individuals and organizations who utilized the park as a "back yard" and for special activities.

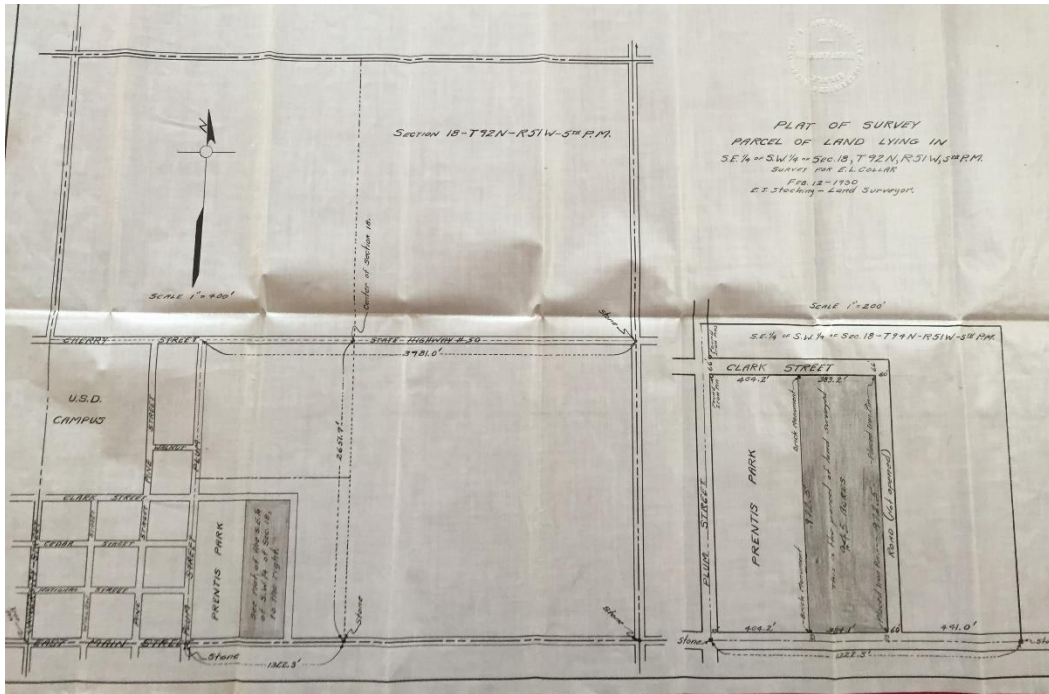
Landowners

Prior to white settlers, the land where Prentis Park sits was occupied by the Yankton Sioux. In the Washington (also called Yankton Sioux) Treaty of 1858, the tribe ceded lands in a triangle formed by the Big Sioux and Missouri Rivers and a line roughly drawn from Fort Pierre to Lake Kampeska (<https://treaties.okstate.edu/treaties/treaty-with-the-sioux-1858-0781>). The treaty contains sixteen articles including reparations given to the Yankton Sioux, their expected behaviors, and the rights of the settlers. On February 16, 1859, the Senate ratified the treaty. Homesteading began that year.

Aaron and Keziah Carpenter were the first white owners of the land parcels that became Prentis Park. Aaron Carpenter migrated first to Nebraska in 1858 from Vermont and settled in Clay County, Dakota Territory three years later. The Carpenters purchased the southwest part of Section 18 of Vermillion Township and developed a thriving farm and nursery. His son George became a partner.⁴ When Aaron Carpenter passed away at the age of 87 on February 55, 1914, George inherited the land. Since George and several other family members had moved to Pringle, South Dakota, George sold the land to Egbert L. and Hattie Collar in 1919 for \$4,000.

According to warranty deeds, four years later, Collar sold a ten-acre parcel of his land to Charles E. Prentis for \$8,000, which Prentis donated to the City of Vermillion to construct Prentis Park. In 1930 Prentis purchased a second parcel of land from Collar for \$7,000, to enlarge the park and include sports fields. A land survey conducted on February 12, 1930, indicates the entire land Collar owned and the two parcels of land that comprised Prentis Park.

⁴ HISTORY OF DAKOTA TERRITORY BY GEORGE W. KINGSBURY SOUTH DAKOTA ITS HISTORY AND ITS PEOPLE EDITED BY GEORGE MARTIN SMITH, B.A., A.M. BIOGRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATED VOLUME IV CHICAGO THE S. J. CLARKE PUBLISHING COMPANY 1915 pages 710-711.



A 1930 survey map of Egbert Collar's land holdings prior to the addition of the second parcel of land highlighted in gray. Land that constituted the park in 1923 and the additional land that formed Prentis Park is enlarged in the inset to the left. Note that only Plum and Clark Streets bounded the park. Curtesy the Clay County Historical Society.

Stipulations

Importantly, both land deeds that Prentis gifted the City of Vermillion came with the following stipulations.

This deed is made and delivered to the grantee (the City of Vermillion, my addition) upon the express condition that all the land herein described shall be developed and perpetually kept up by the City as a public park known as Prentis Park and that if at any time said land or any part thereof shall not be utilized and kept up, the land will revert to the grantor (Charles Prentis, my addition) or in case of his prior death to his heir or heirs in law.

The first parcel of land that Prentis gave the city in November 1923 was given in memory of his second wife Belle Stanley Prentis who passed away November 6, 1923. Because of grief associated with his wife's passing, Peter Olson, his attorney, read the deed gifting ten acres during a meeting of the City Council meeting (DR, November 8, 1923). Since the land was located outside of the Vermillion city limits, the

aldermen immediately voted to include the land within the city limits. The actual date on the warranty deed to the city was February 5, 1924.

As part of his gifts to the city, Prentis paid for the services of a landscape architect to design the park and the construction of two iron arches at the park's entrances. Although the city obtained the land, Prentis Park would not become a viable park for several years. Part of the holdup was that the city had to raise funds to construct the park and the other was that Collar did not remove his sheds from the land in a timely manner.

The second parcel of land that Prentis gave to the city occurred in February 1930 (VPT, February 6, 1930). The 1930 survey indicated that this new addition abutted the original park land to the east. Thus, Prentis gifted about 18 acres of land to the City of Vermillion consisting of two parcels that cost him \$15,000, not including the cost of the landscape architect.

On September 10, 1936, the City of Vermillion purchased two additional acres of land to enlarge Prentis Park and increase space for parking. The seller was Goodwin Gunderson who received \$800 for the land. In the deed for the land, Gunderson stipulated that *he owned the land he sold and is not now or has been the homestead of himself or any member of his family*. Thus, the size Prentis Park expanded to 20 acres over a period of 13 years. Today Prentis Park is bounded by East Clark Street to the north, East Main Street to the south, Prentis Avenue to the east and Plum Street to the west.

Charles Edwin Prentis

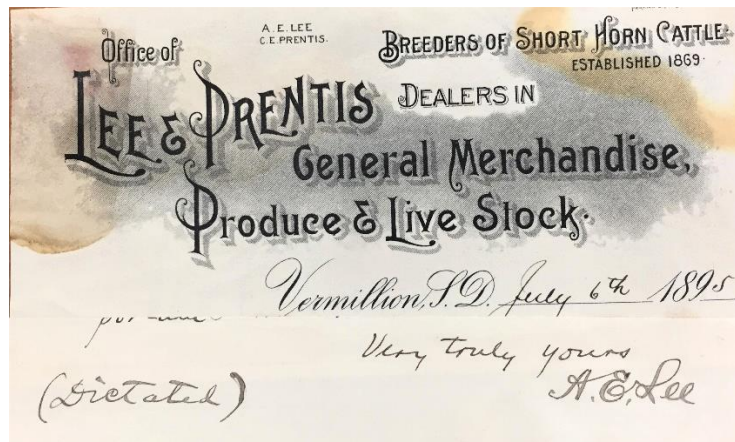
Before the detailed history of the development of Prentis Park is presented, it is important to understand who Charles Edwin Prentis was as a citizen of and entrepreneur in Vermillion and Clay County.

According to his obituary, in the August 13, 1942, *Dakota Republican*, Charles Edwin Prentis was born in Dane County, Wisconsin on September 30, 1847. His parents John and Catherine Prentis, moved from the East coast to Dane County, Wisconsin in 1830 and farmed. Charles Prentis attended local schools. After finishing high school, he furthered his education at the Eastman's Commercial College in Poughkeepsie, New York. Subsequently, Prentis returned to Madison, Wisconsin and worked as a bookkeeper for two years.

In 1869, Prentis and his friend Andrew E. Lee moved to Vermillion, Dakota Territory and opened a small store. At that time Vermillion was a river town located below the bluff on a peninsula between the Missouri and Vermillion Rivers. Following the devastating 1881 flood, Vermillion moved above the bluff, and *Lee & Prentis* (as the business was called) built a new two-story brick building on the corner of Main and Market Streets. The business would last fifty years.



Seated are Charles Prentis with the mustache and goatee and Andrew E. Lee. The gentlemen standing are Lee and Prentis's employees. The 1890 photograph is part of the Clay County Historical Society Archives.



An 1895 Letter head from the Lee & Prentis business. Courtesy of the W. H. Over Museum Archives.

Aside from their general mercantile business, Prentis and Lee acquired large tracts of land in Clay County and in Nebraska and raised short horn cattle. When Lee retired from the business and went into politics, the land was divided. Lee went on to become Mayor of Vermillion from 1892-1896 and Governor of South Dakota from 1897-1901.

Prentis served the City of Vermillion as alderman from 1885-1886 and as mayor of Vermillion from 1913-1916. He also was Vice President of the Citizens Bank & Trust Company of Vermillion. In 1871 Prentis helped found the Congregational Church. He went on to be a deacon of the church for over 50 years. In 1928 he helped fund the construction and upkeep of the fourth Congregational Church on East Main Street.

Prentis was married twice, the first time in 1872 to Mary Frances Stanley who passed away in 1906. A daughter, Kathryn, born to this union, married Stanley Munger from Sioux City. In 1908 Prentis married Mary's sister Belle Stanley Bell, a widow. She died in 1923.

Prentis had a large house on Court Street, overlooking the bluff and across the street from his friend Lee's house. After Belle Prentis' death the building was donated to the University Endowment Fund a forerunner of the USD Foundation. The house is now part of the Bluff Historic District, placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.

Subsequently, Prentis became a boarder in houses on Forest Avenue, first with G.G. Fray and later in Ann Vaith's boarding house. Prentis passed away in 1942 at the age of 94 having experienced and contributed to enormous changes in Vermillion.



C. E. Prentis, his first wife (Mary) and the woman who would be his second wife (Belle) and his daughter, Kathryn Prentis. William Bell was Belle Stanley Bell's first husband, and their daughter was Robin Bell. Courtesy of Cyndy Chaney.

Development of Prentis Park: Ramsdell and Prentis' Vision

Although Vermillion acquired the first ten acres of land for Prentis Park in late 1923, the development of the park took several years. The landscape architect hired by Prentis, Charles H. Ramsdell of Minneapolis. Ramsdell understood Prentis's vision regarding a public park.

In a long letter about the park's development published in the February 21, 1924, *Dakota Republican* Ramsdell wrote:

The plans provide for driveways, walks, flower beds, shrubbery, a plan for an outdoor bandstand and theatre, a concrete swimming pool, children's playgrounds, tennis courts, picnic grounds, parking areas, and everything necessary to make the park an ideal outing place for the old and young.

At that time, regulation of parks was under the Parks Committee of the City Council. A lack of funds and Collar's delay to remove his buildings on the parcel led to delays of park development. Finally, Collar was given a May 1924 deadline to remove his buildings.

Ramsdell presented specific horticultural plans starting with removal of excessive trees and shrubs but suggested selective plantings *along the new park drives, the playgrounds, and surrounding streets, for shade and protection, could well be done very soon, to start the tree growth in permanent place. Practically the entire park should be well covered with trees in groves, or as open specimens of the plan.* Some shrubs, trees, and flowers would be retained.

Regarding playgrounds and areas for recreation, Ramsdell emphasized the need for areas available for individuals of all ages and to include picnic areas. For development of athletic facilities, Ramsdell noted that the University Athletics department should be involved.

In addition, Ramsdell suggested that *"a shell bandstand, large enough for concerts and outdoor entertainments would be desirable. If a theatre arrangement was considered, as we find at Yankton, further detailed plans are necessary. A shell band stand has perfect acoustics and with such a stand, a concert would be easily enjoyed for at least three blocks west of Prentis Park, toward the city.*

Moreover, Ramsdell recommended construction of concrete swimming and wading pools. He thought that a municipal pool would be more sanitary than rivers that he reasoned would become polluted. Paths throughout the park should be graveled and maintained to facilitate access to different areas. Ramsdell envisioned having a park caretaker to maintain the horticulture and different elements of the park.

Most importantly for the park to succeed, Ramsdell promoted the need for publicity and interaction with different groups within Vermillion (including USD) and other communities in the area.

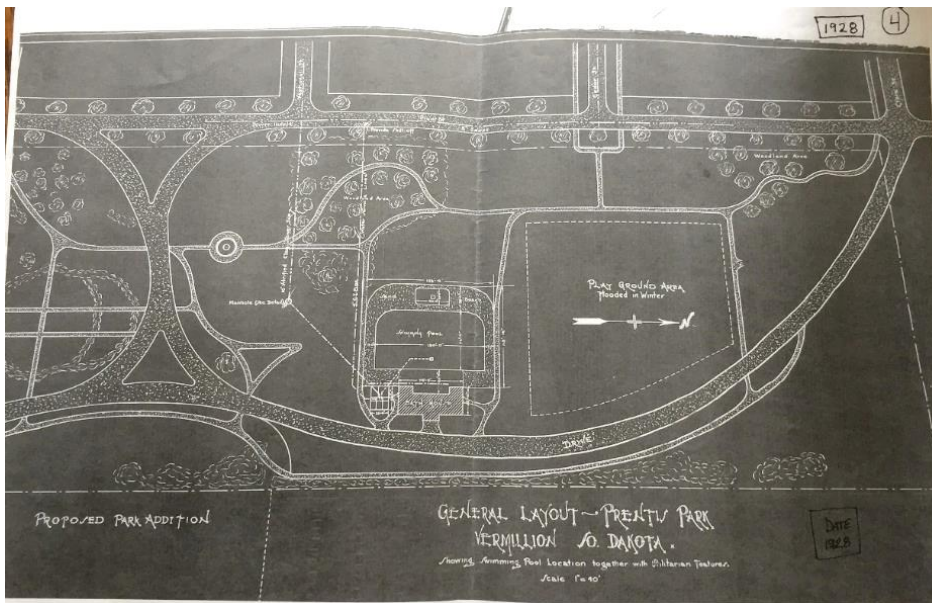
Specifically, he stated: *The success of this park will depend on public support and aid. The chamber of commerce should post in its club rooms for a while at hand, this final plan. All clubs and societies interested in any phase of its development should be carefully solicited.*

For instance, the Boy Scouts, under supervision, could well construct the picnic facilities, perhaps the University Y.M.C.A. could be used to help on a winter skating park, the "tennis fans" might be asked to help on the

tennis courts, etc. Possibly the city band could help on an up-to-date small band stand.

When the University of South Dakota is only three blocks distant, the fullest cooperation of faculty and students should be expected, because of direct location. Prof. Hansen, of State College, Brookings, assures me he will be happy to cooperate by advice and when possible, through the horticulture department. Such a plan on file will assure both donations and appropriations towards its improvement.

Thus, Ramsdell and Prentis had substantive ideas about the development and function of Prentis Park. Many of their visions became reality and still today contribute to enrichment of park attendees' experiences.



Layout of Prentis Park dated 1928 indicating the location of the proposed swimming pool area, roads, playground area (flooded in the winter for a skating rink), and landscaping details. Courtesy of Jim Goblirsch.

The Arches

In 1925 the iconic arches mounted on brick columns were placed on the Park's entrances to the north (on Clark Street and Plum Street) and south (on Main Street and Plum Street). According to the *Dakota Republican* article (January 1, 1925) the arches, erected in more clement weather should contain the park's name, "Prentis Park", and "1923", the year the park was founded. The steel arches were donated by Charles Prentis

(DR January 29, 1930). Over time several of the bricks forming the columns disintegrated. In 2021, the columns were refurbished by mason Doug Griffith.



Undated photograph of the arch at the south entrance of Prentis Park. Courtesy of the Clay County Historical Society.

First Swimming Pool

As mentioned previously, a municipal swimming pool was envisioned early in the plans to develop Prentis Park. According to the March 23, 1925, City Council Meeting Minutes, M. L. Thompson, representing the Civic League, requested a \$10,000 bond be levied to build a swimming pool. Two years later on April 18, 1927 (CCMM), Associated Retailers of Vermillion suggested that the city finance a preliminary survey in conjunction with the Parks and Health Committee (consisting of Harold Bookman, an engineer, Frank Olds, and O. R. Stride) to determine where to locate the swimming pool within Prentis Park. At that time, most City Council members were not enthusiastic about the project.

Thus, the issue to build or not to build a municipal swimming pool was put to a vote of Vermillionites in 1928. Results were Yes: 369 and No:

366. The resolution passed by three votes. City wards one and two were resoundingly in favor and wards three and four overwhelmingly voted no. The Parks and Health Committee members were unsure how to proceed and asked City Attorney Everett Alan Bogue's opinion. Bogue told the committee (May 7, 1928, *CCMM*) to go ahead with the project.

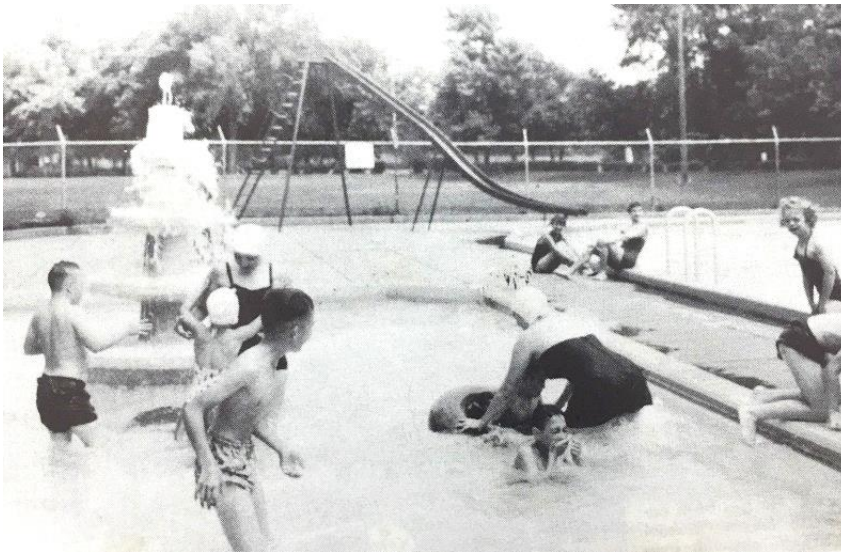
In addition to a swimming pool, the committee suggested constructing a baby pool adjoining the main pool but separated by a grate. To prepare for the project, the Parks and Health Committee, including Ramsdell, did extensive research by visiting municipal pools in Iowa City, Des Moines, Omaha, and Lincoln.

The first sets of bids to construct the two pools were rejected by the council. According to *CCMM*, a second round of bids were opened on February 11, 1929. The winners were architects Perkin's Laboratory from Omaha, , and the construction company, Pioneer Bridge Company from Mitchell, SD. The project cost \$22,776. Since the bid was higher than expected, but contained the elements the Council requested, the issue was again brought to a vote to the citizens in April 1929 and passed overwhelmingly.

In the May 30, 1929, *Dakota Republican*, the aldermen summarized the challenges involved in developing an outstanding swimming pool. They also claimed that it would *be the finest swimming pool in the state*. The project consisted of a large pool measured 75 by 130 feet and the children's pool measured 18 by 38 feet. A sand beach surrounded the larger pool. The bathhouse was 34 by 130 feet and contained 475 lockers. Amenities included drinking fountains, toilets, and excellent lighting. Consequently, the pools hosted thousands of folks from Vermillion and surrounding communities for the next 58 years.



A 1950 photograph of the first pool illustrating the high and two low diving boards. Curtesy of the Clay County Historical Society Archives.



The pool boasted a large metal slide, kids' wading pool, and a fountain within the kids' pool. *USD Summer Bulletin*, July 1955. Curtesy of USD Archives and Special Collections.

Changes to Prentis Park in the 1930s

Although Vermillion was struggling through the Great Depression, with the help of federal assistance from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), several structures in Prentis Park were built in the 1930s. As previously mentioned, by 1930 the park doubled in size and allowed for more amenities, especially playing fields. This section describes the major changes to the park between 1930-1939.

In 1930, the additional land became the site of athletic fields. According to a June 19, 1930, *VPT* article, construction of a baseball diamond occurred with the aid of the USD Athletic Department. Baseball was a major part of recreation in Vermillion and surrounding sites for fifty years. In fact, in 1872, Vermillion played Sioux Falls requiring the team to travel for two days by horse-drawn wagons (*VPT*, October 7, 1919).

An early structure placed in Prentis Park was a log cabin donated by the '76 Club of pioneers and their offspring (*DR*, December 14, 1933). The 1872 log cabin had resided at the William Ufford farm in Fairview Township on land originally owned by Franklin Taylor. In the article, Thelda Taylor Ufford told a story from the point of view the log cabin and what it had experienced over its lifetime.

A foundation for the log building was constructed in the park prior to the move. Civil Works laborers relocated the cabin. Unfortunately, many of the cabin timbers had deteriorated and a new structure was constructed from cottonwood (*VPT*, July 14, 1946). The Girl Scout cabin, as the log cabin became known, still stands. Over the years, it has been repaired several times. Members of the '76 Club used the structure for meetings in the warmer months for several years. Subsequently, the building was used for house Girl Scout activities.

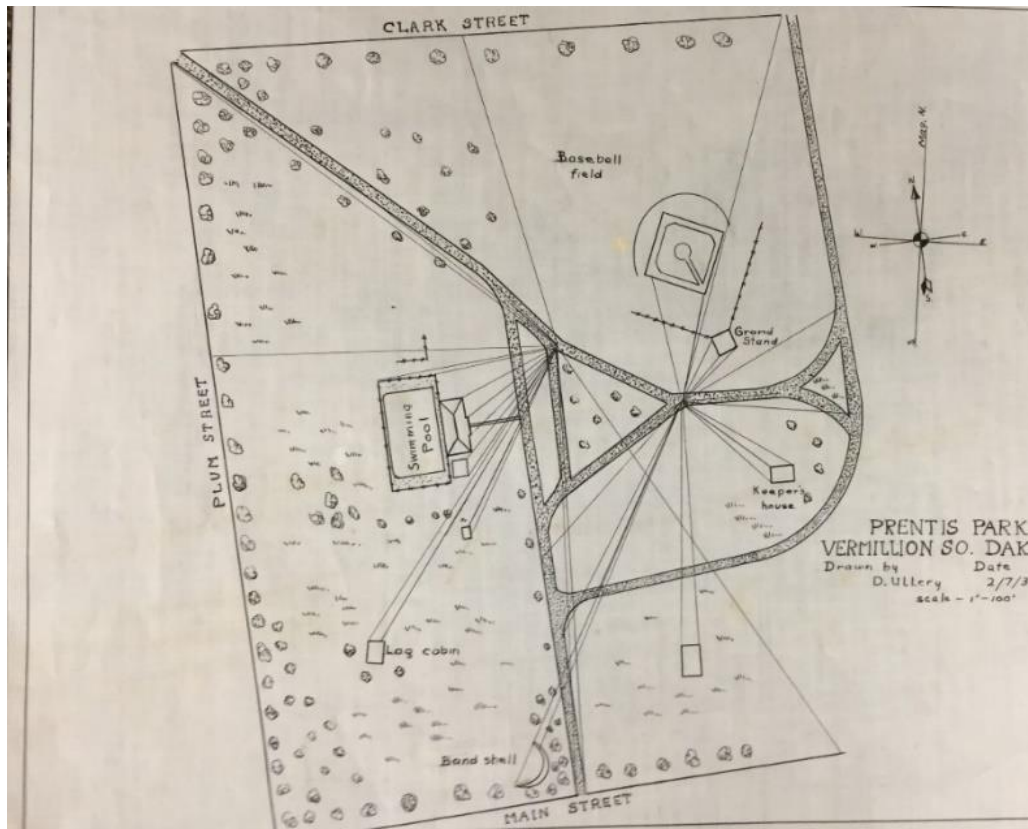


A photograph of the '76 cabin/Girl Scout cabin in the 1950's. Courtesy of the Clay County Historical Society.



A more recent picture of the structure. Note the covers on the windows. Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.

In 1936, a pergola was constructed in Prentis Park. It shows up in the 1939 park blueprint, but was removed in the 1950's.



Blueprint of Prentis Park in 1939 drawn by D. Ullery. Note the swimming pool, baseball diamond and grandstand, log cabin, caretaker's house, and the number of roads within the park. The pergola resided south of the swimming pool. To the south is Main Street, west Plum Street and to the north Clark Street. Prentis Street did not exist in 1939. Courtesy of Jose' Dominguez, Vermillion City Engineer.

The Cobblestone Fireplace

According to the July 14, 1932, *Dakota Republican* article, a cobblestone fireplace was to be built in Prentis Park east of the picnic shelter facing Main Street, under the auspices of the American Legion, Wallace Post 1. Dr. Carl Viers, appointed chairman of Wallace Post 1, directed the construction of the fireplace.

The structure still stands. Several cobblestones are missing. Embedded in the fireplace is a bronze plaque indicating that the American Legion built the structure.



*Photograph of the fireplace and the American Legion plaque.
Photographs by Evelyn Schlenker.*

The Bandshell/Amphitheater

One of the most beautiful, iconic, and functional structure residing in Prentis Park is the Bandshell/Amphitheater. It was designed and constructed by master mason Ole Anderson who was paid \$300 for his efforts (*CCMM, April 5, 1937*). The WPA donated funds for laborers to construct the bandshell.

An August 12, 1937, *Wakonda Monitor* article reported the dedication of the bandshell on the previous Sunday. As part of the dedication

program Vermillion Alderman Peter Leikvold reported that the bandshell that was constructed of historic stones collected throughout Clay County. Embedded in the rocks (10 inches thick and 40 inches in diameter) are three old grist millstones (buhrstones) taken from flour mills at Lodi and Bloomington dating back to 1860's and 1870's. The center buhrstone contains a bronze plaque denoting its origin from the Bloomingdale mill.

Lights above the bandshell were used to illuminate the area. The semi-circular bandshell is 80 feet long and 32 feet from the front of the stage, which is elevated several feet above the area that patrons occupied. This bandshell has been and continues to be used for concerts, presentations of special events, and plays as detailed later in the narrative.

Please note in the Memory Section an older photograph of the bandshell indicates the presence of rock steps and stones lining the front of stage. When these stones were removed is not clear.



Recent photograph of the bandshell/theatre showing the three embedded gristmill stones or buhrstones, the three lights, and entrance to the stage. Rocks delineate the flower garden at the bottom of the stage. Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.



A close-up of the center buhrstone with the inscription on the bronze plaque stating: *Buhrstone from the first flour mill in Dakota Territory at Bloomingdale on the Vermillion River, 1868. Erected by the Pah Waken Chapter, D. A. R., 1938.* Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.

The Caretaker's House: 1937

Another structure built in the 1930s was the caretaker's house. Prentis Park's first caretaker was John Erickson. The house he and his family lived in was constructed in part from wood salvaged from the old Municipal Golf Course Club house (CCMM, September 28, 1936). A new golf course club house was considered, and the salvaged wood was put to good use. Over the years improvements in the house, garage, and shed are mentioned in the CCMM records.

According to blueprints that Jim Goblirsch shared with me, the house was designed by Harold Brookman who served as alderman for six years during the building of the first swimming pool. He went on to be the city engineer in the 1930s-1940s.

Since 1927 Brookman was a faculty member of first of the College of Engineering at USD until 1933. Subsequently, he became Chair of the Department of Applied Science. As university engineer, Brookman was

involved in several projects including the Danforth Chapel and construction of a tunnel system connecting buildings on campus for heating and electrical conduits.



Blueprint of the front elevation of the caretaker's residence. The house also contained a second floor and a basement. HEB in very small letters within the title stands for Harold Edwin Brookman who designed the building. Curtesy of Jim Goblirsch.

Changes to the Park in the 1940s and 1950s

According to City Council Meeting Minutes, during the late 1940's and into the 1950's many changes occurred in Prentis Park. One major issue was lighting the baseball diamond essential for night ball games. The Council sent out a "postcard poll" to garner citizens' desire for increased lighting in the park. Results (740 yes to 205 no) indicated strong support for increased lighting. In fact, construction of lighting poles drew a considerable audience (*VPT* April 29, 1948). Along with lighting of the baseball field, came improvements in bleachers, concession stands, more parking spaces, and the fence surrounding the field.

An important part of the park for both children and parents was the playground. Equipment included a slide, a sandbox, a jungle Jim, swings, and bouncy animals.

In 1954 the caretaker's house was insulated, a chlorinator was purchased for the swimming pool, and gas was provided for picnic area burners. In 1958 shuffle boards were constructed and in 1959 the 550,000-gallon metal water tower became part of the park (*VPT* November 6, 1958, and *VPT* April 2, 1959). The park water tower stood 128 feet high and helped augment the water supply for the city that the older 100,000-gallon water tank on Market Street provided. In the memories section mention is made of climbing the park water tower.



A recent photograph of the water tower. Note the children's playground situated south of the base of the tower. Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.

The Veterans Memorial

During World War II, the idea of constructing a monument to honor soldiers who died during the great wars was conceived, but the actual construction did not begin until spring of 1946 (*DR* April 4, 1946). The memorial was located within a landscaped area on the northwest corner of the park. The inscription on the large concrete monument stated *Dedicated in the memory of all who have served and to those who gave their lives in service of our country in World Wars I and II. Clay County, South Dakota.*

In 1976, as part of the United States bicentennial celebration in Vermillion, the memorial was rededicated. An inscription on the monument was added below the original inscription stating: *Rededicated July 4, 1976 on our Nation's 200th birthday in honor of the Clay County Veterans of all wars who sacrificed their lives in the service of their country.* The memorial became a focal point during many Memorial Day celebrations. Wreaths from all military branches were laid at its base as well as symbols with names of soldiers.

In 1998, the Clay County Commissioners and City Council members decided to construct a new Veterans Memorial on the southeast corner of the Clay County Courthouse grounds (VPT July 10, 1998). Sandy Dickenson was the architect.

Veterans' monuments belonging to the late Kenneth Mockler and the monument in Prentis Park were incorporated into the new memorial. At the back of the Prentis Park monument is an inscription: *A box is enclosed in the base of this monument containing a list of names of those from this county who served in World War I and II.* The only structure remaining from the Veterans Memorial in Prentis Park is a concrete birdbath with no signage.



The Prentis Park birdbath.



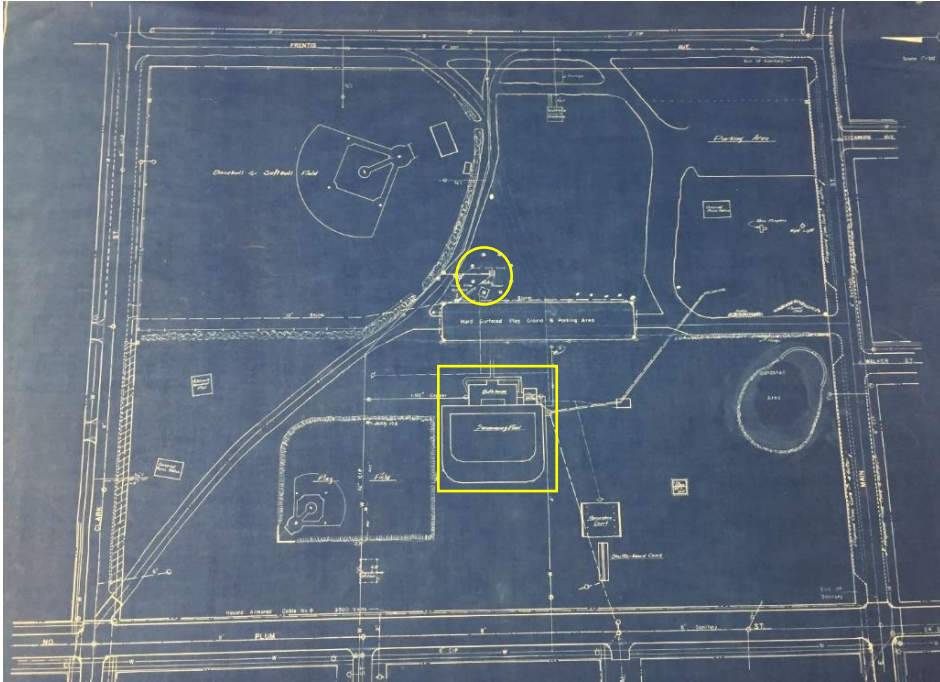
The Veterans Memorial from Prentis Park located on the grounds of the Clay County Courthouse. Photographs by Evelyn Schlenker.

The Second Swimming Pool: 1966

A major change to the park in the 1960s was construction of the second swimming pool to replace the first one built in 1929. As early as 1963 (VPT, October 24, 1963) the need for a new swimming pool was discussed. To justify building a new swimming pool, the existence of several, significant structural problems in the old pool was presented to the Council. There was vigorous opposition by some Council members and citizens, although Dr. Carl Christol, Professor at USD, noted that the old pool was a money maker and was used by hundreds of people living inside Vermillion and surrounding areas.

By the beginning of 1964, interest in building a new pool grew and the discussion of an outdoor pool commenced, although some citizens wanted an indoor year-round facility. Specifically, the support for an indoor pool was as follows: an outdoor pool was used 90 days per year versus an enclosed pool that could be utilized year-round (VPT February 2, 1964). On February 20, 1964, the *Vermillion Plain Talk* reported that discussion continued regarding what type of pools should be constructed (large pool and children's wading pool), indoor or outdoor, and the cost of building the pool. An assumption was made that an outdoor pool would cost \$115,000 whereas an enclosed pool would add \$40,000 to \$50,000 to the cost. Moreover, according to consultants, it became clear that renovating the old pool and bathhouse was uneconomical.

By June 1964, Dewild, Grant, Reckert and Stevens from Rock Rapids, Iowa presented three plans for an outdoor pool. The projected cost would be \$303,000 for a 50- by 165-foot pool that would allow for competitive swimming meets to take place in Prentis Park. Built in 1966, at a cost of \$150,000 new structures included the bath house, a main pool, and a wading pool. Opening day for the pools was July 4, 1966 (VPT July 7, 1966). The Olympic-sized pool was well used and appreciated by Vermillionites, competitive swimmers, and patrons from surrounding areas for 48 years.



Blueprint of Prentis Park in 1980 showing the site of the 1966 swimming pool (rectangle) and legs of the water tower (circle). Note the two ball fields. Courtesy of Jose' Dominguez.



A photograph of children enjoying the new pool. Courtesy of the VPT, July 16, 1966.

Managing Prentis Park

Another important development for managing Vermillion parks was the creation of a new Vermillion governmental role: a full-time Director of Parks and Recreation position. This section describes the four Directors and their contribution to further improvements in Prentis Park.

When Prentis Park was established by the City of Vermillion in 1923, a subcommittee of alderman was put in charge of parks. After the swimming pool was constructed in 1929, individuals were hired during the summer months to run the swimming pool, concessions, baseball fields, and as lifeguards. Austin and Prentis Parks as well as the Municipal Golf Course each had caretakers, not living on the premises.

In 1937 John Erickson was named the first Prentis Park caretaker residing in the park. In return for his and his family's efforts to maintain the park, he received a horse, house, and salary (CCMM, February 23, 1937). The family consisted of John Erickson and his wife, Anna, and seven sons and three daughters. Erickson also had responsibility for the park in the summer as a part time lifeguard and repairing equipment associated with the pool. Erickson died suddenly on September 12, 1947, at the age of 56 years.



The Erickson family portrait. Thanks to William Ranney.

Over the years several individuals are mentioned in City Council Meeting minutes as caretakers for Prentis Park. According to Dave Nelson, Director of Parks and Recreation, caretakers and directors lived in the house until 2012, when the house was abandoned.

Parks and Recreation Directors

As the number of parks and population of Vermillion increased, the City Council deemed it necessary to hire a full-time director of parks and recreation. The director reported back to the council and later also to the city manager. Four people held the position since 1962. Below is a description of the directors. I was able to interview Dave Nelson and Jim Goblirsch. Both highlighted challenges and contributions they deemed significant to managing Prentis Park during their tenure.

Directors Donald Gannon and Ray Palmer

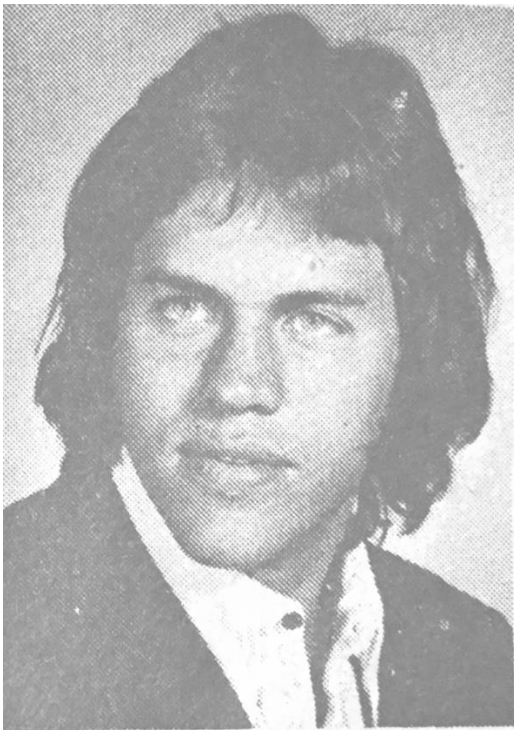
In 1962 Donald Cletus Gannon became the first Director or Superintendent of Parks and Recreation who managed recreation and all the parks owned by the city. He was mentioned in several *Vermillion Plain Talk* articles from 1962 until 1966 when he resigned. Director Gannon lived in the caretaker's house. He oversaw a staff that worked for him.

Donald Gannon received a degree in forestry from South Dakota State University and worked as a Parks Superintendent in several South Dakota cities including Aberdeen, Faulkton, Pierre, Vermillion, Madison, and lastly in Hot Springs. Gannon was a charter member of the South Dakota Parks and Recreation Association (SDPRA) and president of the organization in 1971 when he lived in Aberdeen.

Once Gannon resigned, aldermen were hesitant to hire another Director of Parks and Recreation (*CCMM* September 5, 1967). However, in 1969 Ray Dee Palmer was hired. He was a veteran having served in the Army from 1941-1945 obtaining the rank of Master Sergeant. Palmer, like Gannon, was a SDPRA charter member. Director Palmer led Parks and Recreation until his sudden death in 1975 at the age 54. At his funeral, pall bearers included Mayor Merle Offerdahl, City Engineer Joe Gillian and prominent individuals associated with USD athletics, Dwane Clodfelter, Dr. Don McCullough, and Dr. Charles Spencer.

Director Dave Nelson

The next Parks and Recreation Director, Dave Nelson, held that post from 1976 until 2012. According to an August 26, 1976, *Vermillion Plain Talk* article, Dave received a BS in business education, with minors in physical education and social sciences from the University of South Dakota. He was a Vermillion High School assistant coach in track and field. For one and a half years, prior to becoming director, he served as assistant director of Parks and Recreation and became acting director when Ray Palmer fell ill and died.



Dave Nelson

Dave Nelson when he was hired as Parks and Recreation Director. Thanks to the *VPT* August 26, 1976.

I interviewed Dave Nelson on April 28, 2022. Of his major achievements as director, he mentioned rebuilding the baseball grand-stand and concession stand. Since Prentis Park was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001 (<https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/01001218>), he had to construct the structures close to historic accuracy.

When Dave took over as Director, the pool was about 10 years old and required new stainless-steel gutters to replace rusting cast iron gutters. He also mentioned that the major addition to pool was a large slide. According to Dave, a contest asked for names for the slide. Rodger Baron's daughter came up with the name *Prentis Park Plunge*. More about this name when we discuss the third, current pool.

Another concern with the pool was the lack of a heater. Well attended Red Cross swimming lessons occurred early in the morning starting at the end of May and lasting to early June. The water was very cold. Consequently, a three million BTU heater was installed. Dave mentioned that the pool, filtering system, and heater needed constant maintenance.



*Dedication of the Prentis Pool waterslide in the 1966 pool.
Courtesy of Dave Nelson.*

Horticultural issues in Prentis Park that Dave dealt with included American elm disease that took out 65 trees. Replacements included ash, linden, and hackberry trees. To supply trees and shrubs for the park, Dave started a nursery out of town.

Early in Dave's directorship, the park had an overabundance of dandelions. The issue was highlighted in a *Vermillion Plain Talk* article (April 5, 1978) entitled *Dave, Dandelions, and Dump*. According to Dave, Charles Leffler, in charge of the Municipal Golf Course, suggested that Dave spray in the fall of the year after the first hard freeze to

eradicate the dandelions, not in the summer. After three to five years of such treatments, there were far fewer dandelions in the park.

Dave lived in the caretaker's house for about five years and then had Prentis Park caretakers live there. Dave felt having an occupant in the park dissuaded trespassers and vandalism.

The playground was and is an important component in the park. Over the years, several groups raised funds to upgrade the playground. Dave mentioned that Jenny French fundraised for new equipment. What was raised was matched by the city. The merry-go-round was removed for health concerns, as was the high diving platform in the pool.

Another challenge was spraying for mosquitos. In 2003 West Nile disease was widespread in South Dakota, thus spaying was a necessity. In addition, larvicides were applied to ditches and wet spots. State sponsored grants allowed Dave to purchase a 24-48 Fogger and chemical supplies. Spraying typically was done later at night when no activities occurred.

One highlighted activity in the second Olympic- sized pool was the July 4th swimming contests for all age groups. At the end of the contests, children dove for money tossed into the pool. Other events occurred in conjunction with the Fourth of July celebrations included a chili cook off, parades, and band concerts.

During the summer, swimming competitions were held at the Prentis Park pool. "Doc" Don McCoullough (1915-2010), Professor and Chair of Health, Physical Education and Athletics and USD Head Swimming and Diving Coach oversaw the events. Coach McCoullough came to the University of South Dakota in 1966 and was instrumental in developing a university swimming team. He stepped down as coach in 1981.

Coach McCoullough was also very active in the community forming the Vermillion Swim Club. Swimming competitions brought folks into Vermillion to participate in the competition and cheer on the athletes. In addition, they added to the economy of the area, but competitions closed the pool for recreational swimmers.

Moreover, Coach McCoullough also taught Red Cross Swimming for several decades in the Prentis Park pool. Between 1986 and 1990 he gave baby swim lessons according to Dave Nelson's summer *Parks and Recreation Brochures* he shared with me.

Although he continued to swim competitively into his later years, Coach McCoullough relinquished his role as an instructor and USD and in Prentis Park. For his efforts, he was inducted into the Coyote Sports Hall of Fame in 1996. In 2004, the E. Don and Betty McCullough Aquatic USD Scholarship was established in his honor (<https://goyotes.com/hof.aspx?hof=129>).



Don McCullough Professor Don McCullough. *Volante*, February 26, 1980. Curtesy of USD Archives and Special Collections.

The Coyote Statue

Dave Nelson also shared with me the story of the coyote statue that was part of Prentis Park for 10 years. The coyote statue was carved by Ray “Wild Mountain Man” Murphy from Rapid City from a large American Elm tree stump. The statue was located just east of the Bandshell (VPT, October 26, 1983). Over time, the statue fell victim to the elements and started to decay. High school teacher Larry Monfore rescued the statue and rehabilitated it. Currently it sits in the New National Guard Armory.



The Coyote statue when it stood in Prentis Park. Courtesy of Dave Nelson.

Baseball and other Events

Dave oversaw the addition of more baseball seating and a new scoreboard. Moreover, a grant allowed the Minnesota Twins to conduct a baseball clinic at the baseball field. According to Dave, a kid from Iowa showed up and demonstrated enormous baseball pitching promise. A plaque on baseball fence commemorated the event.

Dave was also in charge of special events planned by different organizations in Vermillion. These activities included plays, concerts, baseball contests, and arts in the park. The best evidence for these activities was gleaned from the Recreation Guides published for many years.

Prentis Park boasted many facilities such as a lighted baseball field, a swimming pool with a 110-foot slide, playground areas, picnic shelters, lighted shuffleboard courts, lighted basketball courts, lighted horseshoes, and disk golf started in 1996 and currently has 10 holes. Disc golf tournaments became an annual occurrence.

A New Picnic Shelter in Prentis Park: 2006

Jim Stone wrote his recollections how he, in consultation with Dave Nelson, built a new picnic shelter in the southeast part of Prentis Park. His narrative is below presented in italics. Photographs are curtesy of Jim Stone.



The old picnic shelter and overhang. Note the flat roof.

This narrative describes the refurbishing of a picnic shelter in Prentis Park. The old picnic shelter, pictured above, had a flat roof which required a lot of maintenance. The roof was rotting out as most old flat roofs do in the Midwest. In the picture above, note posts and beam in the center of the ceiling, which were holding up the ceiling and the roof. The supports on the old picnic shelter are shown in the accompanying picture. These held up the overhang on the old picnic shelter.

Dave Nelson who was the Parks Director in Vermillion at this time (2006), asked Jim Stone who was managing Fullerton Lumber Co., if Jim could draw up a plan, estimate materials needed, and recommend a contractor who would be a good, reliable, and reasonable builder. With all this information in hand, Dave Nelson, and I made a presentation to the City of Vermillion.

The city was very pleased that the shelter could be replaced and most of the details of the original structure could be duplicated. The pitched roof was a hit as no one had thought of the problems of a flat roof.

Estimates of materials and cost of materials and labor bid from Brad Stolpe and his teenage sons, were presented to the City Council who voted to start the project. The city agreed to demolish the old shelter and haul away the resulting material.



The new picnic shelter in Prentis Park built in the same location as the shelter it replaced. The picnic shelter construction was completed on July 26, 2006.



Supports that hold up the overhang on new picnic shelter, just like the old picnic shelter. Car siding for the soffit. Roof support beams were covered with red cedar boards, the posts were also covered red cedar boards and the ceiling is covered with 3-1/4" wainscoting, all like the original shelter. In addition, 4x4 red cedar angle bracings for top of the posts to the roof support beam were added to give the structure added stability. Everyone was pleased with the

contributions of Brad Stolpe and his teen age sons. Even though he has a farm across the river, he still is doing work in Vermillion with his adult sons. Brad Stolpe and sons are very good at whatever project they construct.

Director Jim Goblirsch

Jim Goblirsch started work as City of Vermillion's fourth Parks and Recreation Director on February 25, 2013. He came from Caspar, Wyoming. Previously, Jim lived in Yankton and played amateur baseball in Prentis Park. Thus, prior to accepting the director's job, he was very familiar with the park.

During an interview with him on June 28, 2022, Jim expressed that in 2013 the park was "tired" and needed major changes. He was aware of Prentis' stipulations regarding the use of the park, the historic nature of the park, and that it was on the National Register of Historic Places.

He mentioned necessary changes to the park included removal of shrubbery around the ball field. Shrubs were overgrown and posed a health hazard from mosquitoes, garbage, and places to hide. An important factor involved in park renovation was to make the park more environmentally safe. To address these issues, Jim worked with the Vermillion Police Department and TSP, Inc. from Sioux Falls.

Overgrowth was a problem in several other parts of the park including the uninhabited caretaker's house which was in rough shape. Thought was given to either razing or moving the house. Since the structure was contributory to Prentis Park's National Register of Historic Places status, removal of the caretaker's house needed sanctioning by the State Historic Preservation Office. This included filling out forms, taking pictures, and presenting the case to the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission. Ultimately, the house was moved.

One of the most popular attractions in Prentis Park is the playground. As part of the park renovation, playground equipment was updated to increase variety and safety for children. Except for two bouncy animals, all previous equipment was removed. Funds for playground equipment were raised from private donations and fundraising as well as city funds. The current playground, well used by children of all ages, year-round is pictured below.



Current Prentis Park playground. Note the bouncy yellow horse. Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.

Additional major renovations to the park included rebuilding a picnic shelter near the south-central part of the park and rebuilding the brick pillars supporting the Prentis Park metal arches. Moreover, a new bathroom was constructed on the northwest section of the park. Also, the park became dog friendly: “doggy poop stations” and a “doggie drink site” were added on Plum Street. Under Jim’s watch the disc golf course was enlarged and improved.



A poster for the 2022 Disc Golf Tournament. Courtesy of Jim Goblirsch.

The Third Swimming Pool: *Prentis Plunge*

To publicize the construction of the third Vermillion City pool (later named following a contest), several public information presentations occurred. In addition, a vote was held to obtain support for a general obligation \$3 million bond. The vote in favor of the bond obligation passed on a 3 to 1 margin. Money was also garnered from the city reserve funds, a second penny sales tax, and a 5% tax on malt beverages. The later source of revenue was approved by a vote of the citizens. A naming contest winner for the complex was *Prentis Plunge*. You may recall that this is the same name of the large second pool slide.

The *Prentis Plunge* complex consists of a lazy river, swimming area, a water slide, a basketball hoop, and a one-meter diving board. Amenities also include shade structures, water features, a beach, and a changing building. The pool was completed in 2017. Due to the COVID pandemic in 2020, the pool was closed, but reopened in 2021.



An aerial view of Prentis Park in 2014 prior to major changes.



A drone image of Prentis Plunge, the bathhouse, water slide, and the water tower. Photograph with permission by Kent Osborne.

On-going renovations in Prentis Park included construction of new brick pedestals for Prentis Park arches at the North and South entrances in 2021. With the aid of the newly formed Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission, this project enhanced the appearance and longevity of the pedestals and the gateways to Prentis Park.

A recent improvement in the park is a sidewalk along the park on the west side of Prentis Avenue. Thus, three sides of the park have full sidewalks. According to Jim, future projects include renovation of masonry in the bandshell. Several stones as well as parts of the buhrstones are missing.

Thus, over its 100 years of existence, Prentis Park has undergone many changes to its landscape as well as amenities that add to the enjoyment of the park. It remains the oldest, continually used park in Vermillion.

Events in Prentis Park

Many planned and unplanned events took place in the park over 100 years. Annual events revolved around holidays in the spring and the summer months. Other activities included band concerts, theatre presentations, drawing, and arts and craft classes, festivals, horse shows, women wrestlers, swimming competitions, horseshoe contests, disc golf, basketball games, and baseball games. In this section only some events are highlighted. We start with some unique events and then transition to more recent recurring events.

Professional Women's Wrestling

On June 21, 1956, an article in the *VPT* announced that the coming Saturday (June 23rd) Prentis Park would host professional women's (the article called them girls) wrestling matches. A photograph and event ad accompanied the article. Margie Marlow is featured in the tag team match.

The first match consisted of Donna Dillinger, and Hillbilly Sue and the second match consisted of Ferne Laverne against Princess Dawn Eagle. Note Margie Marlow is wearing heels and a stylish bathing suit in the first picture. The second picture gave a different image of a wrestler.

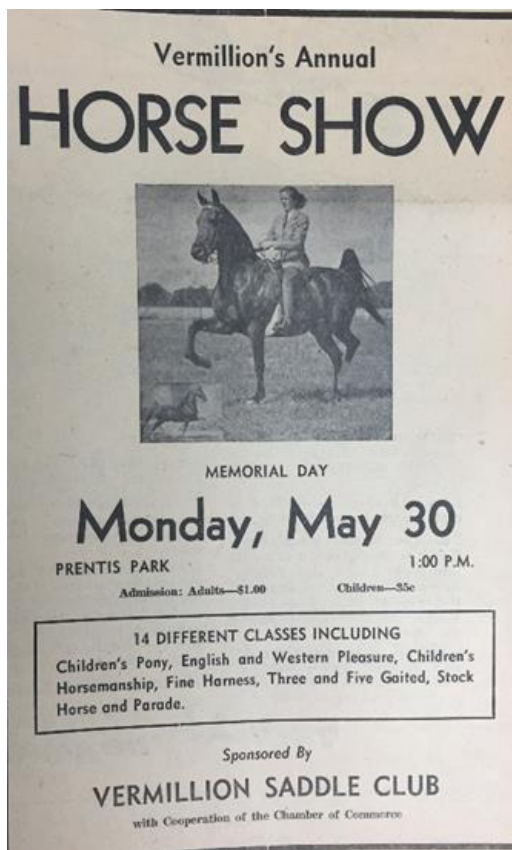


The image is a composite of two parts. On the left is a black and white photograph of a woman, Margie Marlowe, standing with her hands on her hips, wearing a dark, one-piece swimsuit and high heels. Above her is the text "On Wrestling Program". Below the photo is the caption "Margie Marlowe". On the right is a rectangular advertisement for a wrestling event. The ad has a white background with black text and a small photograph of a woman wrestling in a dark singlet. The text in the ad reads: "WRESTLING", "BALL PARK", "Vermillion, S. D.", "Sat., June 23", "8:30 p.m.", "FIRST GIRL'S MATCH", "Hillbilly Sue vs. Donna Dillenger", "SECOND GIRL'S BOUT", "Fern Laverne vs. Princess Dawn Eagle", "MAIN EVENT", "Tag Team Match", and "Admission: 50c — \$1.00".

Horse Shows in Prentis Park: 1955 & 1956

Annual juried horse shows were well attended in Vermillion and usually took place at the Fair Grounds. Entries were from South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska. There were two occasions one in 1955 and the other in 1956 when horse shows occurred in Prentis Park before the swimming pool opened for the season.

The 1955 program was well advertised in the May 26th *VPT* article. Dr. I. D. Weeks, President of the University of South Dakota, was the chairman for general arrangements. Below is a poster advertising the show in Prentis Park sponsored by the Vermillion Saddle Club. The event coincided with Memorial Day.



Advertisement for the 1955 Horse Show published in the *Vermillion Plain Talk*, May 26, 1955.

The Little Pour in Prentis Park

For the past eight years Chris Meyer, Associate Professor of Sculpture, held the *Little Pour* on his 14-acre farm. In 2022 Meyer and the University of South Dakota hosted the 7th Biennial Western Cast Iron Art Alliance Conference in Vermillion entitled "Passion and Practice" from October 5-9, 2022. In conjunction with the conference, on a cold Friday, October 7th starting at 5 pm and lasting several hours, a carnival and iron pour occurred in Prentis Park. The parking lot abutting Prentis Street was heavily covered with sand and served as a staging area for the iron pour (or *Little Pour*).

For the *Little Pour*, Chris and his students produced molten iron derived from small sized cast iron pieces liquified in an in-house constructed furnace. The liquid iron was poured into specially constructed molds or thrown against a wall creating firework-like demonstrations that awed the appreciative crowd. Recently, Chris mentioned to me that the production of molten iron *fireworks* (called *dashuha*) originated in China 500 years ago as an alternative to much more expensive fireworks. Hopefully this event will become an annual event. Photographs by Evelyn Schlenker.



Chris Meyer in the foreground wearing the black sweatshirt. He is standing on the sanded Prentis Park parking lot prior to the iron pour. The furnace is in the background.



Pouring molten iron into casts.



Throwing molten iron against a wall to produce dazzling "fireworks".

Welcome Table Picnic in Prentis Park

The Welcome Table is an organization that was started in 2001 serving meals to the Vermillion community. By 2002 it went from serving meals once a month to serving meals every Monday evening unless the Monday fell on a major holiday. According to its website, *the primary mission of the Vermillion Welcome Table is to provide an inviting place where everyone can come together to share food, fellowship, service,*

and a sense of community. It accomplishes this mission by serving a warm, nutritious meal in a safe environment on a weekly basis. Running the program requires planning and the help of many devoted volunteers.

Initially, Welcome Table meals were held at the Methodist church, until the Community Connection Center was constructed in 2018. However, a major obstacle in 2020 precluded dine-in meals was COVID. Consequently, in 2021 meals were on a take-out basis only. That year, Welcome Table held picnic meals in the summer in Prentis Park. The tradition continued in 2022.

John Lushbough, founder, and longtime Executive Director of Welcome Table mentioned to me that the Prentis Park Welcome Table meals were a big hit. There were many folks who attended the events, some who he had never seen before. Because of the success of this new venue, John is considering holding Prentis Park Welcome Table picnics in the future.



The USD Women's Basketball team serving dinner at Prentis Park for the Welcome Table in 2021. With permission John Lushbough.

Recurring Events: Sports and Culture

Prentis Park was and remains the site of a variety of sports and tournaments. This includes swimming contests, baseball (young players once were called "midgets"), teenager, amateur, semi-professional), basketball, horseshoes, volleyball, and disc golf. For many years, a field in Prentis Park was flooded with water which froze and became an ice-skating rink. A warming shed provided shelter from the cold.

Over time, newer venues such as Barstow Park, the DakotaDome, and school gymnasiums as well as the Community Center (National Guard Armory on Princeton Street) became additional sites for sports and recreation. Currently, the predominant sports in Prentis Park include baseball, basketball, disc golf, non-competitive swimming, and practice for the Vermillion Area Swim Team, an off shot of the Vermillion Swimming Team. Moreover, the pool is used by patrons for other purposes than swimming including water aerobics and lap walking.

In addition, Prentis Park provided a space for many art and cultural events including music presentations, fine arts, performance of plays, and arts and crafts children and adults in the community and surrounding areas. In addition, events were associated with holidays including the 4th of July, American Legion Day (July 30th), Memorial Day (May 30th) and Labor Day (first Monday in September). Some of the celebrations included plays, community-wide feeds or picnics, USD-sponsored student watermelon feeds, "pavement" dances, music presentations (soloists, choirs, and bands), speeches by renowned individuals, and if warm enough, swimming competitions and water carnivals. Attendance at these events was consistently high.

Baseball

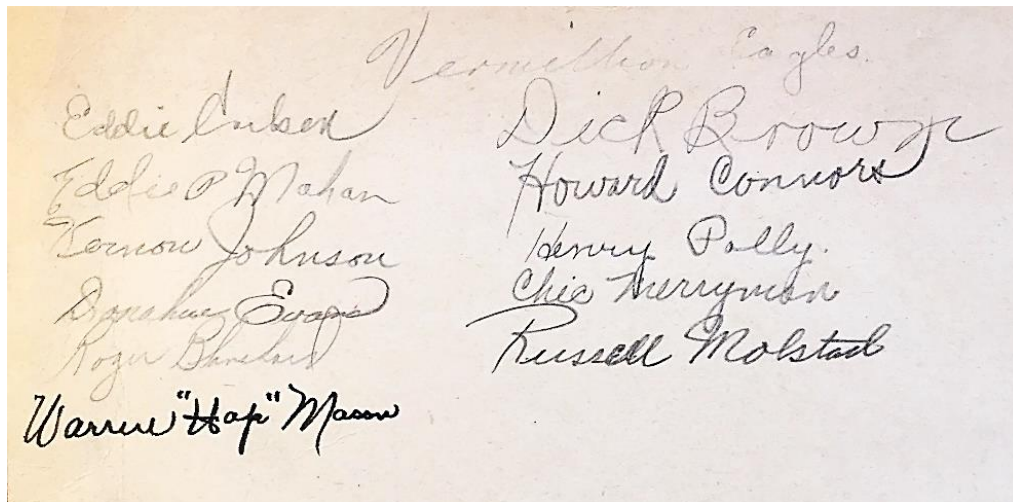
Baseball is a long-time sport in Vermillion. Teams using the Prentis Park fields included the Vermillion Eagles, Vermillion Red Sox, Vermillion Gray Sox, and the American Legion sponsored Post 1. Last year Post 1 won the state B legion championship (<https://www.aberdeennews.com/story/sports/2022/08/03/vermillion-wins-south-dakota-class-b-legion-baseball-state-championship/10219007002/>).

Over the years, other organizations also used Prentis Park sports fields including the Vermillion High School Tanagers for football practice and the USD baseball team (https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/University_of_South_Dakota).

A snapshot of the 1948 Vermillion Eagles Baseball team

One team that played baseball in Prentis Park was the Vermillion Eagles. Jim Goblisch loaned me a large scrapbook compiled by Harley Grass, a Vermillion resident. The scrapbook contained clippings from summer 1948 *Vermillion Plain Talk* articles describing Vermillion Eagles' games. The team was semiprofessional and was managed over several years by the legendary player and coach Howard Connors who was inducted into the South Dakota Sports Hall of Fame in 1972. Howard Connors, who was an accomplished baseball player, was also math professor at USD and USD Dean of Men. This team played in Vermillion for several years in the 1940s to 1950s.

A page in the Grass scrapbook contains signatures of several team players and the bat boy, Dick Brown.



The year 1948 was seminal for the Vermillion Eagles and the city since the Eagles Club donated funds to install a lighted score board. Importantly, that year, night lights illuminating the Prentis Park ball field were the first in Vermillion athletic history. Moreover, the new bleachers could seat several hundred spectators and more parking areas allowed participants to come to Prentis Park from outlying areas.

A program dedicating lighting the field was attended by 3,000 onlookers. Dr. Robert Patterson, Dean of the School of Business acted as master of ceremonies. Bob Oden, President of the Vermillion Athletic Association, switched on the lights. Entertainment by the Barbershop Chorus rounded out the event. Mayor H. W. Frankenfeld threw out the first ball. That night the Eagles played the Yankton Terrys and won the game (VPT June 10, 1948).

The Vermillion Eagles played ball teams from South Dakota including Beresford, Yankton, Elk Point, Lennox, and Akron, Hawarden, and Rock Valley from Iowa. In addition, that summer the Eagles played teams outside the area including the Sioux City Van Dyke House of David, the San Francisco Cubs, and the Chicago Barons. Of interest, the players of these teams were called "colored" or "Negro" teams in VPT articles. Importantly, *Vermillion Plain Talk* articles lauded the players' abilities.

In 1948 the Eagles became state champions for both South and North Dakota. The Eagles went on to play in the national baseball congress in Wichita, Kansas, but were eliminated after the second game (VPT August 26, 1948).



Team picture following defeat of the Beresford Bees for the South Dakota Championship. VPT August 19, 1948.

In 1948 Mickey Owen visited Vermillion twice that year. Owen was a professional baseball player, coach and scout who played in the Major

Leagues for 17 years (<https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/mickey-owen/>). Owen was the catcher with the Vermillion Eagles in two games and held two teaching sessions for youngsters (*VPT* August 5, 1948).

The Vermillion Eagles team was admired within the state and ads in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* not only mentioned the next game but advertised for upcoming games. Below is an example of an advertisement when Mickey Owen played catcher for the Vermillion Eagles.

COMING
Baseball Attractions
At Beautiful Prentis Park

Tuesday Night
August 10
8:30 p. m.

Bride Construction Co.
SIOUX CITY

vs.

Vermillion Eagles

ADMISSION
Adults: 60c Including tax.
Children: 25c Including tax.

Saturday Night, Aug. 7
9:00 p. m.

Van Dyke's Colored

House of David

vs.

Vermillion Eagles

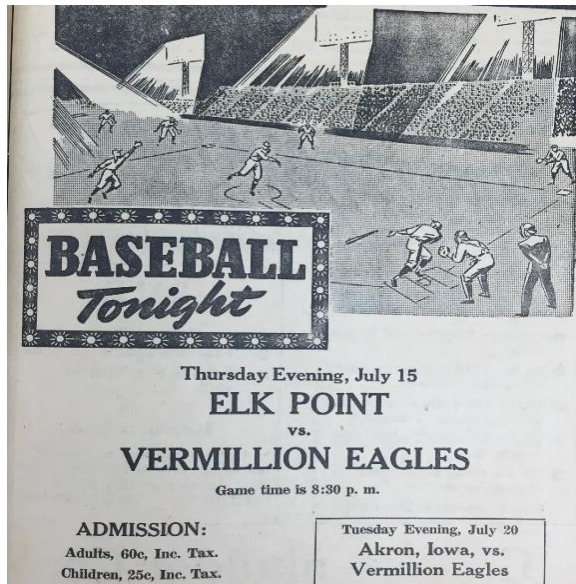
Catching For the Eagles
MICKEY OWEN
the All-Star Catcher of the National League

This will be Mickey's second appearance in Vermillion catching for the Eagles.

ADMISSION: \$1.00.

Advertisement for the House of David team playing the Eagles. Note that Mickey Owen is featured. *VPT* August 5, 1948.

Several ads, like the one shown below, emphasized the excellent lighting on the field, allowing night games (VPT July 8, 1948).



University of South Dakota Summer Art Camp

Dr. Wilbur Stilwell, an accomplished art professor at USD, held summer art classes for high school students in Prentis Park from the 1950s until late 1960s. Stilwell was a nationally known artist and art educator who received several prestigious awards in his lifetime. His latest posthumous award was in 2021 as a founding member of the College of Fine Arts Hall of Fame.

Professor Stilwell and his wife Gladys, also a trained artist, collaborated on several projects and inventions. Stilwell went on to spend 32 years at USD, 26 years as Chair of the Art Department. Every February an annual juried student art exhibition at USD occurs in his honor.

In the flyers Stilwell used to advertise his summer art camp classes, he noted that classes would be held in Prentis Park. Students worked on the lawns and near the swimming pool.



summer school USD

Professor Stilwell discussing a project with a student while other students were drawing near the Prentis Park swimming pool. Curtesy of USD Archives and Special Collections, Richardson Collection, I. D. Weeks Library.

Vermillion Area Arts Council (VAAC) sponsored Summer Art Festivals

The VAAC was formed in 1974 and received 5013c status in 1977. From the very beginning it fulfilled its mission to *bring education and enjoyment of the Arts in its many facets: visual and fine art, literature and poetry, dance and movement, theatre, and music, to Clay County, South Dakota.* (<https://www.vermillionareaartscouncil.com/about>)

With support of grant funds from the South Dakota Arts Council, the VAAC produced a series of Arts Festivals held in Prentis Park from 1974 to 1980. Most of the information gleaned regarding the Art Festivals was from the VAAC archives thanks to Ally King, Director of the VAAC.

One aspect of the festival was a juried art show. The first judge of the show was the renowned artist Oscar Howe who was Artist in Residence

and Professor of Art at USD (July 24, 1974 issue of *The Sioux City Journal*).



Oscar Howe the art judge for the first juried art show.

According to a July 18, 1974, *VPT* article, the VAAC-promoted programs in the park also included *Shakespeare in the Street*, a band concert, and the New Dance Theatre, a dance group from Sioux Falls.

In 1976 in conjunction with the Bicentennial Celebration held in Vermillion, the VAAC promoted several children’s activities such as Poet-Tree in the Park, a Drama Workshop, and Fun under the Tent, all in Prentis Park. In 1980, the last VAAC sponsored activity in Prentis Park was a juried art exhibition.



Photograph showing an art exhibit. Thanks to the VAAC archives.

The South Dakota Shakespeare Festival

Beginning in 2012 the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival (SDSF) produced nine Shakespearean plays and conducted educational activities in Prentis Park (<https://www.sdshakespearefestival.org/sdshakepearefestival>). Performances occurred on the amphitheater stage with the bandshell as a backdrop. The audience was seated on the lawn below the stage. In 2013 only education activities were presented and in 2020, due to COVID, *Shakespeare at a Distance*, an on-line set of programs occurred. In 2022, the SDSF produced *Othello*.

The mission of the organization is *to engage, connect, and inspire communities by exploring our shared human experiences through inclusive, professional Shakespeare productions and theatre arts education*. The organization promotes open access to programs, inclusion, integrity, and artistic excellence. Additional information about the SDSF can be found on (<https://www.sdshakespearefestival.org/>).



A scene from the SDSF production of *Richard III* on the Prentis Park stage. Note the bandshell and embedded buhrstone in the background. Photograph courtesy of the SDSF archives.

The Cardboard Regatta

According to the *Vermillion Plain Talk* article (August 24, 2018) Vermillion's first Cardboard Regatta took place in 2018 at Prentis Plunge. The event was started by community volunteers who thought the endeavor challenged the floatability and maneuverability of creative watercraft creators.

The activity was a collaboration of the City of Vermillion, the Parks and Recreation Department, the Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library, and interested community members. Designs for the boats were unique as were some of the "oars" that participants used to power the boats.

Several prizes were awarded for the fastest, slowest, and most "spectacular" sinking boat. Adults helped keep children safe and contributed to the fun event. The following year the event was repeated to great acclaim.

In 2020 because of COVID, the pool was closed as were many events enjoyed by Vermillionites. However, in 2021 the event returned, and all participants received a prize even if it was only a cardboard one.

In 2022 the Cardboard Regatta was a soggy event, but construction of boats was as creative as ever. This annual event in Prentis Plunge illustrates how the interaction of several organizations created a new event in Vermillion involving children and adults.



Photographs from the 2022 Cardboard Regatta. Note that the green boat overturned. Courtesy of Sandra Mollman.

The Pooch (Doggie) Plunge

The year 2022 marked the eighth year of an event that occurs just prior to closing the Prentis Plunge "lazy river" for the year. The event is a fundraiser for the Heartland Humane Society in cooperation with the City of Vermillion. Over a hundred dogs participate in the doggie party. Dog owners pay five dollars admission fee per dog for a two-hour period of fun and frolicking for the dog and their owner.



Poster advertising the Doggie Plunge for 2022. Note the requirements of the dogs to participate in this activity. Thanks to the Vermillion Department of Parks and Recreation.



Doggie Plunge in 2022. Photograph curtesy of Lisa Ketchem.

Municipal Band Concerts in Prentis Park

Mention of municipal band concerts supported by the Vermillion City Council was described in the early 1900s. Concerts occurred in different locations in Vermillion and Clay County. In a July 25, 1929 *VPT* article the idea that a bandshell/amiptheatre being the perfect venue for band concerts was mentioned. However, it was not until 1937 that a bandshell was constructed. Subsequently, municipal concerts presented in Prentis Park used this venue. The last municipal band concert in Prentis occurred in conjunction with the bicentennial celebration in 1976.

Willard Fejfar was an accomplished director of the Municipal Band in the late 1940s to 1950s. Willard Fejfar was well-known band director, who conducted the Vermillion High School band for 15 years. He retired from teaching in 1959 (*VPT* April, 29, 1994).



Willard Fejfar

Photograph of Willard Fejfar from the *Dakota Republican*, June 5, 1947.

Fejfar was born in Yankton, SD and received his undergraduate degree from Yankton College in 1937 and a Masters degree from USD in 1947. Fejfar helped establish the South Dakota All-State Band program and took leadership positions in the SD Bandmasters Association acting as president from 1947-1951.

A *VPT* article from May 29, 1952 cited Fejfar's role as director and tactics he used to solicit musicians for the volunteer municipal band. Musicians and singers included Vermillion High School students, USD summer students, alumni, and community members. To further engage the audience, words to songs the band played were projected on a large screen.

Below is a copy of the Vermillion Municipal Band program with Willard Fejfar as director (VPT June 10, 1948). Note that the program included a baton-twirling exhibition and the section toward the end of the program for community singing led by Reverend Larson.



Over the years municipal band conductors included High School and University of South Dakota faculty members. Revival of band concerts occurred years later.

Music is Alive Festival: Beginnings of new concerts in Prentis Park

By David Holdhusen

In 2020 the *Music is Alive Festival* was conceived by David Holdhusen, Chair of the Department of Music at the University of South Dakota, as a way for a variety of music ensembles from USD and Vermillion High School to perform for audiences in Prentis Park at the height of the COVID pandemic. What follows (in italics) is David Holdhusen’s narrative describing the development of the first festival.

The first festival took place at Prentis Park on October 11, 2020 during a time when performance ensembles were considered dangerous and large crowds were discouraged. Holdhusen believed that music was indeed surviving during this time when it was gone from public view. After considering the research at the time and determining that most medical experts believed that an outdoor venue was somewhat safe, the planning for the event began. Six USD ensembles were selected for

inclusion in the initial event (Chamber Singers, Chamber Strings, Percussion Ensemble, The SOUND of USD Marching Band, Symphonic Band, and the Symphony Orchestra).

Holdhusen wanted an event that brought the community together and provided an opportunity for more Vermillion Area music. This is when the music groups at the Vermillion High School (VHS) were brought into the fold including The Pride of Vermillion Marching Band and Rhythm in Red. These additions opened the event to a wider audience and demonstrated that music was indeed alive across the Vermillion community. Once these ensembles had agreed to participate, the city of Vermillion needed to sign off, a sound permit was obtained, and Brian Adams was consulted to ensure that amplification of the event was possible.

Next, the name for the event was chosen. An original plan called for the event to be called the TanaYote Music Festival (combining the names of both schools mascots, Tanagers and Coyotes), but Holdhusen wanted something that really spoke to the challenges of the times. At the dinner table in his home, the name Music is Alive Festival was proposed by his daughter Annika. This seemed to exactly fit the message. Marketing soon began using this name. USD Marketing and Admissions, as well as the Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company were supportive in the planning and advertising of the event.

COVID precautions were expected for those who attended. Stages were set far apart with the expectation that people move between performances. Ensembles were spaced out in the performance area to 6 feet apart and masks were worn as possible to adhere to the CDCs COVID guidelines. Masks and social distancing were expected of the audiences as well. The first festival ran from 2-5 pm with the groups staggered every 20 minutes. The schedule is shown in the 2020 poster.



Poster for *Music is Alive* in 2020. Thanks to David Holdhusen.

The event was a great success and was repeated in 2021 and again in 2022 to large audiences, with hopes that it becomes an annual event.



The University of South Dakota Chamber Orchestra performing in the amphitheater during the 2022 *Music is Alive* festival. Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.

Memories

The next section contains memories of individuals who considered Prentis Park their “backyard”, and used many of the facilities in the park, sometimes in ways not intended. In addition, there are memories of individuals who managed the park and who helped construct parts of the park. In some cases, the exact words of the individuals are included in italics, otherwise transcripts of interviews are presented.

Connie Fejfar Berry in an email to Constance Krueger:

Memories of the Prentis Park Band Shell Concerts

In the 50’s we lived one block from Prentis Park and most of our days were spent at the pool. But Wednesday nights were extra special, a free concert in the band shell.

My dad, Willard Fejfar, directed the band composed of mostly high school students but sometimes musicians from the University filled in. My dad was a perfectionist...every concert was well rehearsed, and every chair was filled. His 95-year-old brother, Don Fejfar who was also a musician, remembers helping out in the trumpet section along with Clois Smith, Wayne Ufford, and Julie Rock.

Those nights were magic. The acoustics were perfect and of course the band played tunes we could all enjoy. Adults sat on benches while the kids gathered up front on blankets. We marched in line to John Philip Sousa and practiced our cartwheels and summersaults. We danced to the music and clapped and clapped and clapped.

Possibly the best part was at the end when Carlton Chaffee led us in a sing a long, with the lyrics projected on a movie screen. This is where I learned all the old tunes like “The Band Played On” and “Waltzing Matilda”. The Connors lived next door to us, and Margie remembers the night they played “Margie”. She was sure my dad did that on purpose to honor her. When we got home, there was Margie at the door thanking him for playing “her song”.

Vermillion was a special place to grow up and Wednesday nights in the park were the icing on the cake. I love what Margie said, “...memories of band concerts are surrounded by good feelings of safety, happiness, and love.”

**Carla Connors and Cathy Connors Gullickson in an April 2, 2022,
email to Susan Keith Gray**

Dear Susan,

From Carla:

While I have a few minutes between Saturday students, I will send some thoughts about Prentis Park. I asked my siblings for memories and got some from Cathy and Margie that I will share. But first, some of my memories.

Many of the memories of Prentis Park revolve around the swimming pool, which was the universal hang-out for Vermillion kids in the summer. I remember the old, old swimming pool with a kiddie pool that wasn't connected to the big pool. Mom took me there.

And then there was the summer we didn't have a pool at all while the new one was built. (That pool has changed, too.) Red Cross swimming lessons took place in the morning before the pool opened to the public. It always seemed cold for swimming lessons. Once the pool opened, lots of kids were there all afternoon.

At a certain age, moms just sent the kids by themselves, counting on the lifeguards to keep the peace. (Because I would get sunburned, I couldn't go until 2:00 and had to leave at 4:00. Bummer.) From our neighborhood it was easy to bike over. Good idea to bring some money for a snack afterwards. Close by there were often older men playing horseshoes. Never did learn that game.

There were summer band concerts in the band shell. Girl Scout activities used to take place at the small stone building in the park. Our family spent lots of time at the baseball diamond, watching the men's league (with Dad playing, (Howard Connors, my addition), the American Legion and the high school teams, too.

I learned to ice skate on the ice-skating rink that was flooded each winter, across from where the TKE house is (used to be the Chi Omega house). Thank goodness for the warming house, which allowed us to stay skating longer. I used the picnic area closer to Clark Street more when I was living across the street at the Theta house.

Here are some thoughts from Cathy:

Vermillion was founded in 1859, and it must have been the centennial celebration in 1959 that I remember. Mom made us pioneer outfits to wear, and I believe there was an event at the band shell in Prentis Park. I have vague memories - I would have been eight.

I think there were summer productions at the band shell. I'm sure there are records of those somewhere - I have only dim memories of those.

Of course, we were at the ballpark all the time for town games and American Legion games in the summer. I remember USD playing baseball there when Dad was coaching them. When we were little, we would often go over in our pajamas and just stay in the car to watch a few innings from behind the fence along the first base line.

The Fourth of July fireworks were always shot off from the ballpark. We would sit in the stands and at the end they had an American Flag that would light up in fireworks in the outfield.

I remember the old pool with the ridiculously dangerous fountain in the baby pool (Margie tells a story of getting caught under it and almost drowning, I think) and the pool itself had a curb around it...resulting in many stubbed toes.

The Girl Scouts had the Girl Scout Cabin (log cabin) in the Plum/Dakota quadrant of the park, and I remember making lanyards or bracelets there.

Lots of my later childhood and high school memories are of the "new pool" (replaced again now). The pool was closed for one whole summer while they built the "new" one. It was terrible! But the new pool was a great place, and we spent every summer day there and many summer nights. Of course, the snack bar was a gathering place on those nights. Then I worked in the office one summer and guarded for two summers so the pool was really my summer place.

The caretaker of the park used to live in a house behind the ball field...across from the houses on Prentis Street. For a while the caretaker was Mr. Gannon, and his wife Mrs. Gannon was my sixth/seventh grade teacher at St. Agnes.

I know we took the cheerleading picture for the yearbook on the band shell either my junior or senior year! It was fun climbing up there for the picture. (We took some family pictures there too - for Mom and Dad's 60th Anniversary.) Cathy Gullickson

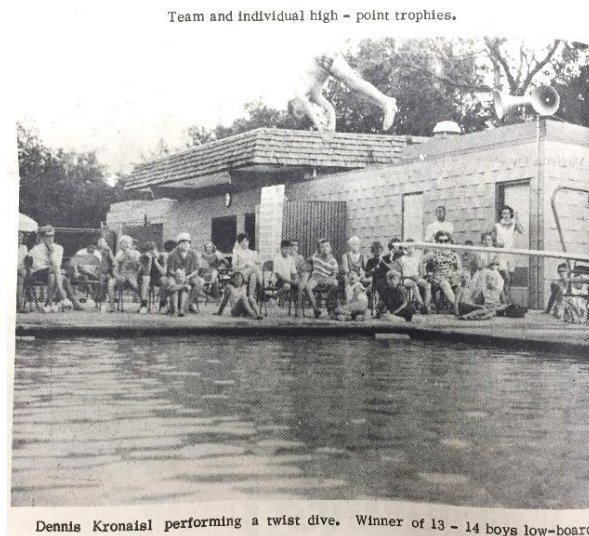
Denis Kronaizl Memories (transcript from an in-person interview 4/12/2022)

Denis mentioned that his family lived across the street from Prentis Park (117 Prentis Avenue) from 1960-2015. Denis observed the many changes in Prentis Park over these years. His parents were Barb and Jim Kronaizl. At the time their house was constructed, it was located at the edge of the city limits near the old Anderson farm. Denis mentioned that the Anderson house still stands. Barb was a lifeguard in the first pool.

Denis reported that he and friends got into trouble several times. For example, when Denis and his friend Chucky Barton were about 4 years old, they got into the equipment room near the empty pool hoping to turn the water on to fill the pool. The police caught them. The second time the youngsters attempted to climb the water tower by shimmying up the cross bars. Both times the police took the young intruders to their respective homes with stern warnings.

Another memory from when he was 4 and up to an older age. In the summer there was a lot of heat and humidity. Consequently, condensation would form on the bottom of the water tower tank and fall like *rain drops*. Denis and other kids would stand under the water tower when that happened and try to catch the drops in their mouths as they came down, cheap but fun entertainment.

Denis noted that swimming lessons given by the Red Cross were mandatory. Since lessons went from 9-11 am, the water and air could be cold. At that time there was no pool heater. General swimming occurred in the afternoon.



Picture of Denis Kronaizl diving during a swim/diving contest in the second Prentis Park pool. Note the incorrect spelling. *VPT* July 17, 1969.

Since, the Kronaizl house was situated directly across from the baseball diamond in the park, folks could watch the game from their home. Denis also mentioned that if a kid caught a foul ball, and returned to the umpires, the kid would get a nickel, enough to buy a candy bar with.

Denis also relayed that at one time cars could park very near the baseball diamond fence. Several cars received dents or broken windows. Changes in car parking solved the problem.

Another thing that Denis mentioned was that if a kid got to the baseball game early, they could get the job of changing the scores during the game. For each game, the kid was paid 50 cents. It was hard work because the score tiles were heavy.

At the age of 10-12, Denis received his first real job that consisted of cleaning up the park in the morning using an *idiot stick* (a wooden stick with a nail at the end) and a canvas bag. Sometimes he would find money or other treasures during his work.

In addition, early morning forays into the park yielded baseballs that had found their way into bushes or tall grass. Denis stated that over the years he collected about 200 balls and sold them back to the team. Bushes near fences also allowed areas to hid (a little like a fort). After games, kids would go to the old stadium and concession stand to collect money that folks lost. In addition, Denis recalled yearly Fourth of July fireworks in the ballpark outfield.

Denis mentioned that a small white shed near the water tower contained nets and a variety of balls that could be borrowed. The shed was moved north of the swimming pool in the winter and served as a warming shed for the ice-skating rink. He started ice skating at the age of 5 years.

Denis recalled that to the east of the Trinity Lutheran Church in the Prentis Park there was a Veteran's memorial that included bronze plaques with veterans' names and a larger concrete monument. He mentioned that on Veteran's Day the memorial was used as a commemoration site complete with a 21-gun salute. Following the ceremony, kids picked up the empty shells and used them for whistles.

Denis also stated that as kids got older, they got more adventurous including climbing the water tower, swimming in the pool at night, and rock climbing the bandshell. He mentioned that Patty, his sister, took a tumble from the bandshell, but was not too badly hurt.

Because of the closeness of his home to the park where the "pool rats" spent so much time, Denis' mother yelled "like a moose" when it was time for dinner.

Denis remarked that there were many activities in the park including horseshoe tournaments with cars lining Plum Street. On the 4th of July Doc McCullough conducted swimming competitions according to the ages of the children. At the end of the competitions, coins were tossed into the pool and kids scrambled to retrieve as much money as possible.

Another activity was going down slides sitting on wax paper. Denis noted that the wax paper made the descend like "glass lightening"!

In the summer Denis and friends lived in Prentis Park for most days sometimes getting a cold hotdog sandwich, cookie, and water and let loose. In the winter, the pull was the skating rink.

Roger Delaney interview August 7, 2022, via phone.

Roger mentioned that his father Joe Delaney was the caretaker for Prentis Park and lived in the caretaker's house for six years. In the winter Joe also worked for the Parks Department.

Roger lived in the caretaker's house with his family from first until sixth grade. He recalls climbing the relatively new water tower. Roger mentioned that methods used to trim the many park hedges would be considered unsafe by today's standards.

Fireworks on the Fourth of July consisted of explosives mounted on 4 by 8 lattices displayed in the Prentis Park ball field. The lattices-embedded fireworks created brilliant pictures when lighted. Roger recalled some firework displays were of the American flag. The finale fireworks mimicked waterfalls like Niagara Falls. The large crates that the fireworks lattices were shipped in served as tree houses and forts that the kids constructed and played with for about three years at which time the forts structural integrity was compromised. He noted that the problem with these types of fireworks and the location in the park limited the size of the audience.

Roger mentioned that the "Monument for the Dead" was in the park across from the Trinity Lutheran Church west of the baseball field. He described an obelisk, and monument with bronze pavers with names and details of individuals who died either during or shortly after World War 1. When the memorial was dismantled, the monument became part of the Veteran's Memorial by the Clay County Courthouse in 2000.

In the summer, Roger's older brother taught Red Cross Swimming at the pool and in the afternoon his brother taught Roger to swim. The pool had a 12-to-14-foot metal slide that became extremely hot in the summers, limiting its use. The entire Delaney family had season passes while Joe was caretaker. Discussing the building of the second and third pools, Roger felt that having an aqua center would have served the community better than outdoor pools that were only used from the end of May until the beginning of September or earlier. When the pool in Prentis Park closed for the season, Roger visited an indoor swimming pool in the New Armory (now the Neuharth Media Center without a pool).

After Roger's father was no longer caretaker of Prentis Park, the family moved to 201 N. University, a house his grandparents purchased in 1910. Roger mentioned several renovations to the house to enlarge it and allow additional rental property. He still lives in that house.

Roger stated that he played Little League baseball but claimed not to be very good.

Interview with Tom Sorensen in person 7/12/2022

Tom mentioned that he swam in all three pools. The first was highly chlorinated. One entered the pool area on the east side prior to construction of the water tower. He walked from his house at 206 S. Pine to the pool in *throngs* better known as flip flops.

Since Tom had a season ticket, he visited the pool regularly. The pool area consisted of one pool that was large, and a smaller "*kiddy pool*". The large swimming pool had three diving boards: two small ones and one high board. As children and teenagers, Tom and his friends would do dives to generate waterspouts or *splashes* with the sole purpose of drenching the lifeguards. The *splasher* dives were called *cannon balls* and *can openers*. He and his friends wore sweatshirts to avoid getting hurt when performing the *splasher* dives.

In an aside, Tom mentioned the pool in the New Armory (now called the Neuharth Center). When the Prentis Pool was closed for the season, Vermillionites were allowed to swim in this indoor swim pool.

The second pool, constructed in 1966 had three diving boards, but the high board was removed. When Tom entered the swimming pool area, he received a numbered basket for his clothing and a tag attached to a large metal safety pin with the same number to attach it to his bathing suit. That pool had heated water.

As a member of the Vermillion City Council, Tom approved building the third swimming pool and remodeling of Prentis Park to its current state. He was enthusiastic about the project with the inclusion of the large water slide.

Tom also mentioned on the off-season firemen would suction water into second pool at Prentis Park to be able to draft water into their firetrucks.



Dennis Weise (R) and Tom Chaney testing the new Howe pumper Jan. 15, 1964, using Prentis Park swimming pool. Curtesy of the Vermillion Fire Department.

Dawn Nelson and Kirk Sorensen: Interview on August 16, 2022

I had the pleasure of meeting Dawn Nelson and her husband Kirk Sorensen at our *Prentis Park: 100* meeting at the Austin-Whittemore House. The topic of discussion was "Baseball in Vermillion". Kirk (Sorney) Sorensen has a long history of involvement in the game in Vermillion as described below in his SD Hall of Fame Inductee biography ([Vermillion Red Sox baseball KSORENSEN \(ballcharts.com\)](http://VermillionRedSoxbaseballKSORENSEN(ballcharts.com)))

Player/Manager Kirk Sorensen - 2007 South Dakota Hall of Fame Winner

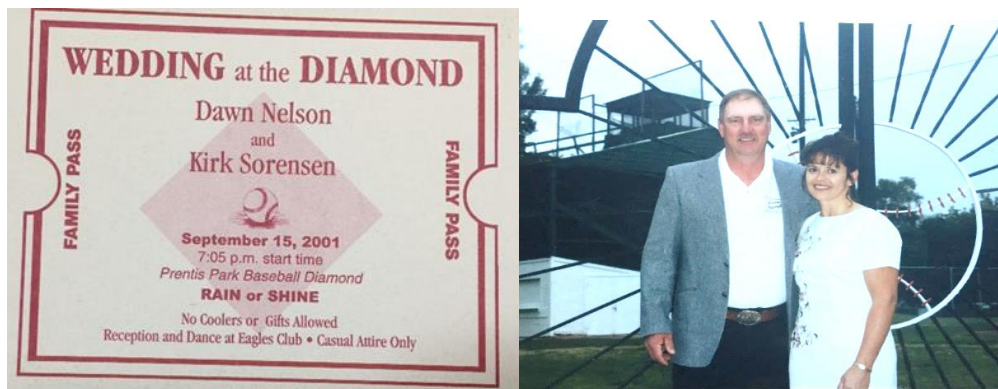
The Vermillion Red Sox are led by Player/Manager Kirk Sorensen. Sorney was born and raised in Vermillion, South Dakota, and graduated from Vermillion High School in 1970. At the conclusion of his 1970 high school Legion season, he was picked up by the Vermillion Red Sox Amateur Baseball Team, thus beginning his long amateur career in South Dakota. He was a powerful hitter and has a hitting record of 6 hits in one game (1976). Sorney continued as player/manager for the Vermillion Red Sox throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988, Kirk Sorensen added the role of Amateur Baseball Commissioner for the State Line League to his lineup of amateur accolades.

In 2007, Kirk commenced his 37 years as player/manager for the Vermillion Red Sox. Over that span, he has reached the State Amateur Baseball Tournament 22 times and won 18 League Titles. In 2003, Kirk won his first-Class B State Championship, having previously finished as high as second place only twice (1992 and 1996). In 2004, Kirk's Red Sox repeated as Class B State Champions. In 2006, after the Red Sox moved to Class A and wood bats in 2005, Kirk's Red Sox won their first-Class A State Championship and began the first amateur team to win State titles in both classes.

Sorney has devoted a considerable amount of his spare time over the prior 37 years to keeping baseball alive in the State Line League and promoting the love of baseball in the Southeast corner of South Dakota. He founded a second Vermillion team in 2001 (Grey Sox). He figures that about 40 local young men have been able to play amateur ball in Vermillion that would not otherwise have gotten a chance. He is very proud of the second Vermillion team.

On September 29, 2007, Kirk Sorensen was inducted into the South Dakota Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame at a banquet at the VFW in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Because of Kirk's love of baseball, Kirk and Dawn were married on the baseball diamond in Prentis Park. Even their wedding invitations looked like baseball tickets. Thanks to Dawn Nelson for providing the images.



The wedding invitation and the newlywed couple.

Aside from a love of baseball, the couple share a love of music as members of the well-known country music group, the Clay Creek Deaf Cowboy Band. The band was inducted into the South Dakota Country Music Hall of Fame in 2013.

Jerome Anderson & Marsha Anderson Thompson **Memories of Ole Anderson**

On October 12, 2022 I interviewed Jerome Anderson and Marsha Anderson Thompson, grandchildren of Ole Anderson the master mason who helped design and construct the bandshell in Prentis Park. All pictures used in this section the book are with the consent of Jerome Anderson and Marsha Anderson Thompson.

Jerome knew Ole Anderson well and went on some jobs with his grandfather. He mentioned one job fixing bricks at the First Baptist Church. Jerome also watched Ole Anderson carve several basswood figurines. One figure, a pioneer, was carved using as a template pen and ink art pieces rendered by the renowned artist Oscar Howe who was a USD Professor of Art and worked as an assistant director of the W. H. Over Museum. That carving and others are on display at the Over Museum. According to Jerome Anderson, not all of Ole Anderson carvings were successful. Consequently, failures were burned.



Oscar Howe's picture of the pioneer.



Ole Anderson's carving of the pioneer at the W. H. Over Museum.



Ole Anderson carving figurines at the W. H. Over Museum



Carving of a mason by Ole Anderson

Ole Anderson was born on 1886 in Sweden. He came to the United States in 1903 at the age of 16 years. Early on he worked as an apprentice with Erick Nylen, a successful contractor in Vermillion. Anderson married Christine Backlund in 1910 and lived in a house he built close to the Nylen's on North Dakota Street. Sadly, the Nylens died a few years later.

Aside from private contracts, Ole Anderson worked on projects on the University of South Dakota campus. As a mason, he helped construct the Power Plant on campus (now the Service Center) which is a masterpiece of masonry. He was also involved in building the boiler building north of Old Main (no longer present), the School of Law building (now the College of Arts and Sciences) made of Indiana Bedford limestone, the original section of Administration building (Slagle Hall), the New Armory (now the Neuharth Center), and Phi Delta Theta, a fraternity located on West Clark Street. Thus, Ole Anderson had amassed a reputation as a master mason when he was asked to construct the Bandshell/Amphitheater in Prentis Park.

Jerome mentioned that his father (Gordon Anderson) and uncle (Marsha Thompson's father, Burton Anderson) retrieved the burhstones as centerpieces for the bandshell. According to Jerome, one reason to remove the stones was to make it less likely that Ole Anderson would snag them while fishing!



The Prentis Park bandshell with embedded buhrstones (early undated postcard). Note that the front of the stage and the steps on either side of the stage were also constructed of stones.



Detail of stone construction in the bandshell entrance.

Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker.

Ole Anderson built his house on 426 North Dakota with distinctive a cobbled stone bird bath and a cobbled stone bench in the front yard. He was also a volunteer firefighter. Jerome described the time there was a fire in the Farmer's Elevator below the bluff and Ole Anderson and another firefighter had to lower the water hose down a 60-degree embankment to fight the fire. Despite the efforts of the Vermillion Fire Department, the elevator burned down.

In addition to Anderson's carvings described above, he also constructed fine furniture including fireplaces that included rocks he collected over the years. Another talent Ole Anderson displayed was playing piano and organ. According to Jerome Anderson, Ole Anderson was a gifted, honest, perfect gentleman. When Ole Anderson passed away, Jerome Anderson inherited Ole Anderson's whittling and masonry tools. Jerome Anderson finished several projects Ole Anderson had started.



Postcard showing men working on the University of South Dakota Power Plant 1909-1910. Ole Anderson is the man in the turtleneck sweater holding a trowel.

Jerome considered his grandfather, Ole Anderson, an exceptional artist in several genres who made several significant contributions to USD and to Vermillion. He was much admired by his family and friends.

Conclusion

Prentis Park and the individuals who developed and maintained the park provided a venue for folks of all ages to enjoy events, recreation, and green spaces in the heart of Vermillion. The park is constantly evolving. The success of the park also depended and continues to depend upon the collaborations of many groups and organizations, be they private, school associated, or governmental.

Thus, many of the ideas that Prentis and Ramsdell presented in 1924 regarding the structure of elements and function of the park hold true today. This book gives a glimpse of the development of the park, activities and events that occurred in the park, and memories associated with this jewel in Vermillion. One hundred years and counting!



Drone photograph of Prentis Park today facing east showing Prentis Plunge, basketball courts, the water tower, and the baseball diamond. Photograph courtesy of Kent Osborne.