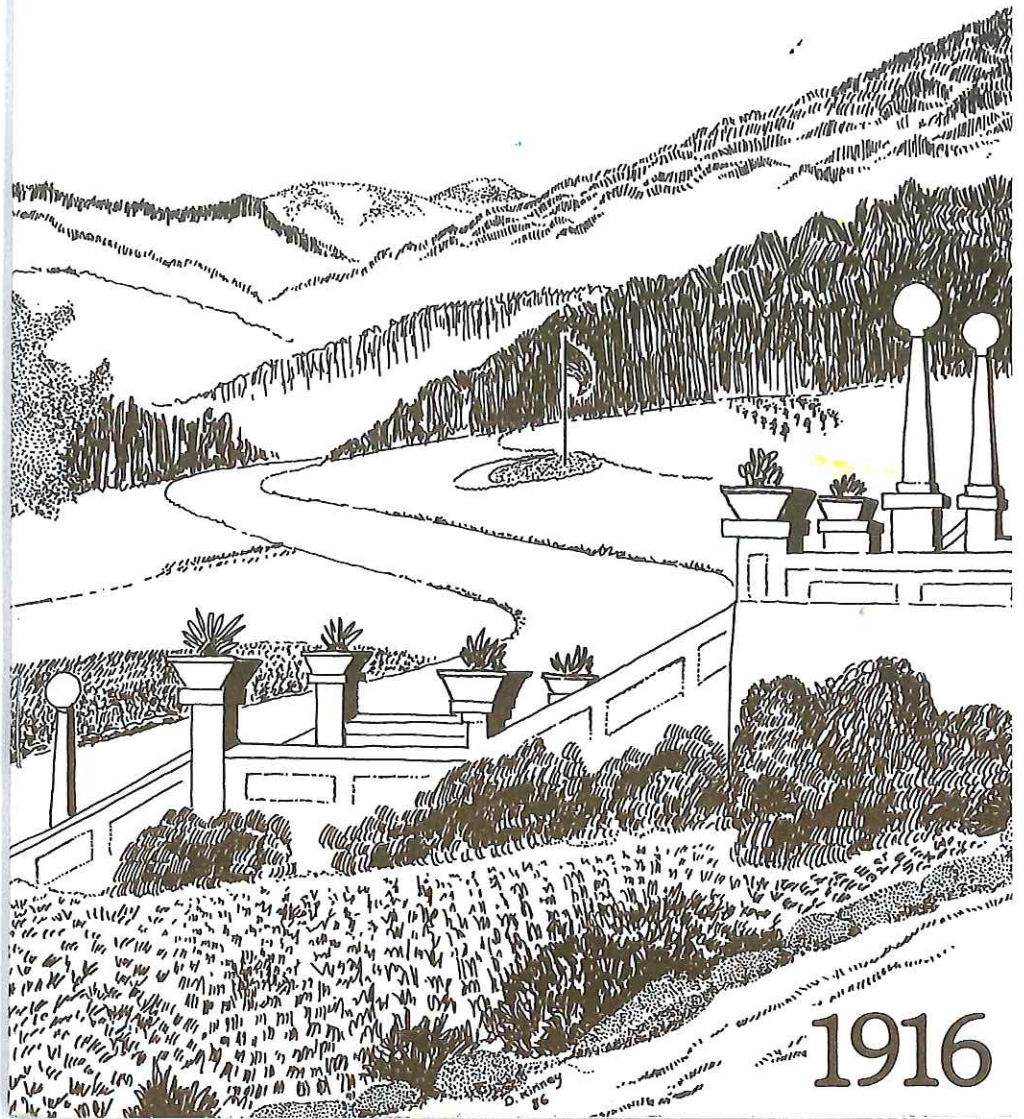


Lithia Park



Lithia Park

Text by Marjorie O'Harra,
with the cooperation of
Eldon Scriptor

Illustrations by Dick Kinney

Edited by Charleen and Robert Edwards

Printing by Artisan Press, Ashland, Oregon

Published by the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department
Ashland, Oregon
© Marjorie Lutz O'Harra 1986
Second Edition Printing — 1992
Third Edition Printing — 1994

Lithia Park

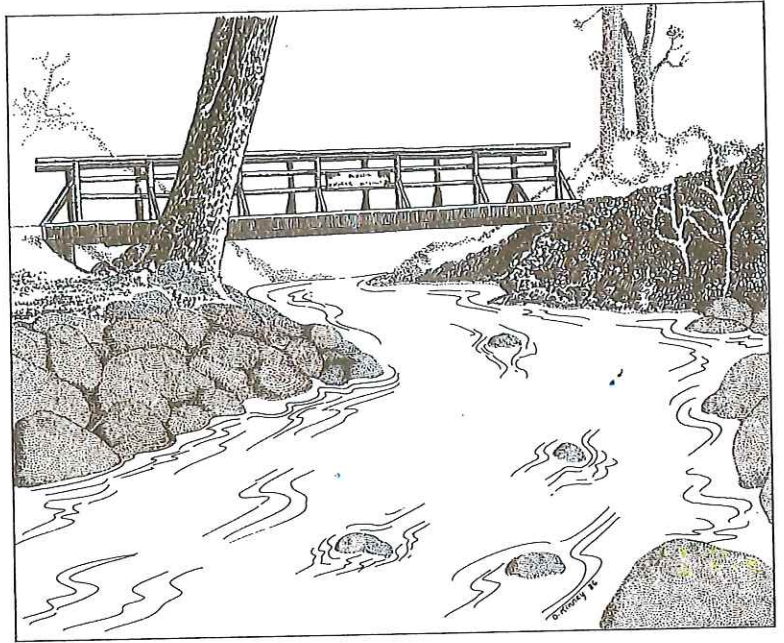
Ashland Creek tumbles and splashes down a forested canyon from the distant skyline of the Siskiyou mountains to the valley below. At the head of that canyon Mt. Ashland thrusts some 7,500 feet into the sky, towering over the foothills and the small town of Ashland.

In the heart of the town is Lithia Park, 100 acres of wooded places and meandering woodland paths that follow Ashland Creek for more than a mile up the canyon from the Plaza. Flower beds, open grassy slopes, and formal plantings blend with native trees and shrubs. The visitor will discover a fine collection of conifers including the coast redwood, the giant sequoia, and the dawn redwood, and an important new collection of maples inspired, perhaps, by the gnarled and twisted Japanese maple that has stood near the entrance for more than 50 years.

Lithia Park unfolds out of the Plaza. The Tudor lines of the Oregon Shakespearean Festival's theaters on the hill merge with the leafy canopy formed by the maple, beech, and catalpa trees that line the path. One walks past Meyer Memorial Lake and the green where the annual Feast of the Tribe of Will heralds the official opening of the Festival's summer season. If you follow the path upstream beyond the playground you will come to a bandshell where the Ashland City Band performs on warm summer evenings. There are well-used tennis courts, and there is still another pond that attracts wild ducks; there are group picnic areas and secluded places on the banks of the stream where the less formal part of the park leads a visitor up the canyon.

Along the upper slope of Winburn Way, the street that winds through the park, you will come upon the Japanese garden where a small stream makes music of its own as it drops and turns from pool to pool. Nearby are the sycamore grove, the graceful terrace with its Italian fountain, and a formal rose garden.

Lithia Park is city-owned, one of the few such parks in the state to be supported by a separate city tax levy. Through the years many generous gifts have made possible much of its development. The park is under the control and management of an elected five-member Park Commission and the care of the Ashland Park and Recreation Department's maintenance staff. It has weathered floods and windstorms, heat and dry seasons; it emerges tranquil,



fresh, and green each year from Ashland's exuberant Fourth of July celebration.

In 1982 Lithia Park was included on the National Register of Historic Places as an outstanding example of distinctive American landscape architecture. The route to that designation is a story of dreams and of politics, of people who persevered. The park is their monument.



The Chautauqua Years

When you stand at the entrance to Lithia Park and face the Plaza, you are looking at the place where Ashland began. The men who filed Donation Land Claims here in 1852 wanted to build a "home town," a place where the gold miners and the settlers who were coming with families could find lumber and equipment, supplies and food, schools, churches -- a community life.

Ashland Creek made all of this possible. First a water-powered sawmill was built on the banks of the stream, then a flouring mill that stood for more than 50 years at what is now the entrance to the park. It ground the first flour in the Oregon country south of Roseburg. People came to the mills for lumber and flour, mostly moved by pack team and wagon. Business grew around the open space that became known simply as "the Plaza": there was a general store, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, and a watering trough for horses. A small hotel accommodated travelers, and Ashland became a stopping place for the California-Oregon Stage Company operating between Sacramento and the Willamette Valley. A school opened, and church groups organized. Many of Ashland's early families were Methodists or Presbyterians. The Methodist Church encouraged the opening of a small college here in 1872.

The land around Ashland was developing for farming. Railroad lines stretched south from Portland and north from Sacramento, and when they joined in Ashland in 1887 the occasion was celebrated nationwide because the union completed the circle of railroads around the entire United States. Wheat and oats, corn and potatoes, hogs, cattle, and sheep grown locally could now be shipped to outside markets, and with improved transportation and promotion, Ashland was ready to grow.

The hilltop above the present-day Meyer Memorial Lake, where the Shakespearean Festival complex now stands, and the flat grassy space between the lake and the playground became the first public park in Ashland because of Chautauqua, a nationwide traveling program of lectures, seminars, and entertainment that originated at Lake Chautauqua in upstate New York. Ashland was 40 years old in 1892, the year the Southern Oregon Chautauqua Association was formed during a Methodist camp meeting near Central Point. Chautauqua, with its promise of "outside interest to awaken the sentiments and the intellect of the people," was

eagerly anticipated. It offered speakers on current events, concerts; classes in literature, history, biology, nature study, Bible study, exercise, economic problems; roundtable discussions on everything from elocution to WCTU doctrine.

The Southern Oregon Chautauqua Association, encouraged by its Ashland members, decided that Ashland would be a better location than Central Point for the annual two-week summer sessions. Here was a town of 1,800 people to help ensure a crowd. Ashland had electric lights, city water, hotel accommodations, a site for an assembly building on a wooded hillside sloping up from the center of town, and a shady place nearby where families could camp on the banks of a stream.

The decision to locate in Ashland and to construct a hall large enough for 1,000 people in time for the opening program on July 5, 1893, was made on June 14 of that year. A building committee was authorized to purchase the Roper Grove tract (almost eight acres) for \$1,500. A bond issue in the amount of \$2,500 covered purchase of the land, construction of a wooden frame building, and cost of the first year's program.

As many as 40 men at a time worked to erect the beehive-shaped building that stood 40 feet high, 80 feet wide, and was shingled from base to cupola. With dirt floors and canvas-covered window openings, it was completed in fewer than ten days and was called the Chautauqua Tabernacle.

Dr. C. C. Stratton from Portland University was the opening night speaker on July 5; W. C. Hawley, a faculty member at Willamette University who later became president of that school and congressman from this district, lectured on the projected Nicaragua Canal and the seal fisheries in the Bering Sea. One of the long-remembered events during the first season was the Rev. Selah Brown's lecture on "What I Saw In Dixie."

Chautauqua was a huge success. For the next 30 years the annual summer sessions drew crowds to Ashland. People came by train and in wagons loaded with camping gear, and many families set up tents in the grove along the bank of Ashland Creek. The path that still slopes up the hill between Meyer Lake and the playground took them to the Chautauqua Tabernacle above. As many as 100 tents stood under the trees during the Chautauqua season; local people joined families who came from as far as Klamath Falls and Grants Pass. Everyone wanted to be near, to participate in all the activities.

The initial effort to make the camping place and the tabernacle grounds more attractive was made by members of the Ladies Chautauqua Club. Following a general cleanup, the women used money from dues and community dinners to hire a gardner and to plant grass and flowers; they planted many of the maple and locust trees which still stand.

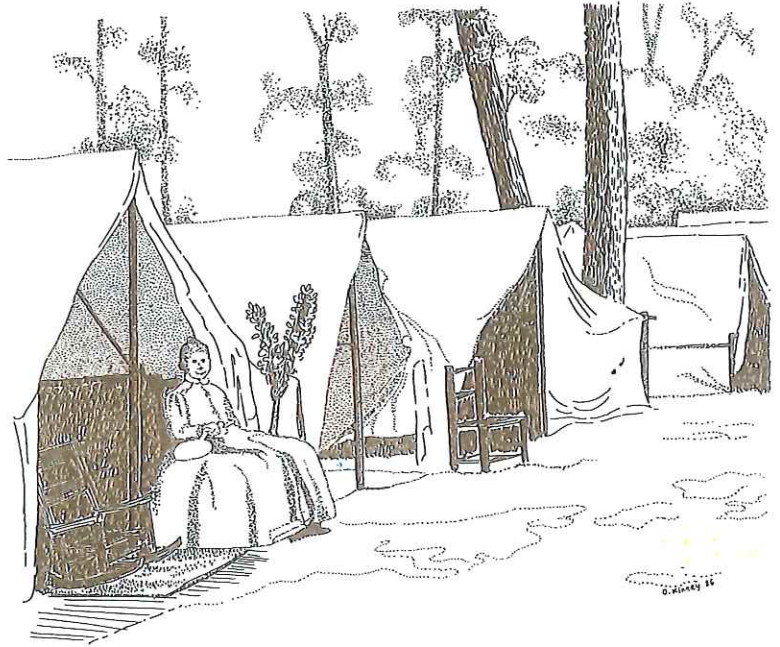
This first park in Southern Oregon, owned by the Chautauqua Association but open to the public, was enjoyed year-round. Few if any other small Western towns of that time had the distinction of providing such amenities. Picnics, Fourth of July festivities, and public celebrations were held here. Ashland soon became known not only for Chautauqua, but for its beautiful park as well.

One circumstance, however, was embarrassing. The old Ashland Flouring Mill, closed for several years because of financial problems, stood between the Chautauqua grounds and the Plaza. The building, the land, and the water rights had been deeded to the city, but the place was uncared for and deteriorating. The need to remove the mill and the example set by the improvements on the Chautauqua property inspired talk of a city park -- a park that would preserve the natural beauty of Ashland Creek canyon, already threatened by a hodgepodge of buildings and a growing accumulation of discarded machinery and debris.

A group of Ashland women decided they must take a hand in seeing that the city acquired the good things it deserved. "God has done his part in giving us a beautiful country and it is up to us to keep it so," they said. With this noble goal in mind, the Woman's Civic Improvement Club was organized. Many of its members also belonged to the Ladies Chautauqua Club.

The group asked the City Council to create a park, one that would begin at the Plaza and eventually follow Ashland Creek up the canyon to Mt. Ashland. The most immediate problem was the flouring mill, the pig pens, cow shed, broken fences and trash behind it. The Chautauqua Tabernacle stood on the hill just above the mill and the ladies reminded the Council that every visitor and speaker was greeted by the sight and smell of this clutter and its attending army of gnats and flies. They proposed cleaning the mill site and making it the park entrance.

The idea was discussed. Some folks thought a business street should be extended through the area, others hoped the Council would not sell the property for business purposes, and a few of the old-timers insisted the mill was a landmark and should be preserved.



Creation of the proposed park was presented to the voters as a city charter amendment, and on December 15, 1908, the measure carried, 607 to 138. All city-owned property bordering Ashland Creek from the Plaza to the Forest Reserve -- excluding streets, alleys, the pest house (where people with communicable diseases were isolated), the rock quarry, and a number of parcels that remained in private ownership -- was dedicated forever for park purposes. A separate tax levy for parks was approved (maximum two mills), and authority for control and management was given to a separate Park Commission. Ashland purposely did not place this responsibility with the City Council. Henry G. Enders, Mrs. Ida M. Gard, George Knoblauch, W.A. Patrick, and Mrs. Mary Meikle were appointed by Mayor R.N. Shell to serve until a Commission could be elected. Because the amendment vested authority with a separate Park Commission instead of with the City Council, and because the language was so all-inclusive, Homer Billings, businessman and local historian, later said he believed "...it must have been written by Judge C.B. Watson, an attorney and nature lover of the first order."

The old mill was torn down the next summer, a landscape gardener was hired, rock walls, a pond, and a waterfall were built, and an additional 40 acres of land were purchased bordering Ashland Creek upstream from the Chautauqua property. At the direction of the new Park Commission, rhododendrons and azaleas were planted in 1910, and playground equipment was installed in 1911.

The public admired the beauty of Ashland's new "front yard" and referred to it as the city park, but continued to use the original Chautauqua Park, where the Ladies Chautauqua Club carried the expense for gatherings. In 1914 a group of these women appeared before the City Council to ask for \$50 a month for six months to help with maintenance costs, but they were turned down, a decision influenced perhaps by the objection several people voiced over tax funds being spent to help maintain property not in public ownership.

Approval to spend money for even city-owned parks was not easily granted by a Council struggling to meet the needs of a growing community. (By this time several other small parks had been developed, the Siskiyou Boulevard park strip had been planted, and additional land had been acquired in Ashland Creek canyon.) H.E. Badger, president of the Park Commission, expressed the sentiments of that group in a December 31, 1913, letter to the City Council.

"To the Honorable Mayor and Common Council of the City of Ashland: You have granted us a 6/10 of-a-mill tax levy for our use during 1914. This will give us the smallest amount we have ever received, making available, probably, \$1,600. Of this amount about \$650 will have to be paid for sidewalk and paving assessments and \$50 for water. With very careful supervision and management we may be able to keep the small parks in fairly good condition; but it will be impossible for us to do anything in the way of improvements in the forty acres up Ashland canyon, which can, with small expense, be made on the most beautiful and attractive parks on the coast."

Ashland: Saratoga of the West?

It's a short walk through the playground and then across the bridge to the rustic lithia water pavilion near the bandshell. Here you can drink -- just a taste may be sufficient -- the lithia water that, beginning in 1913, some people believed could be exploited along with sulphur and soda water to promote Ashland as a mineral water spa. The effort to develop the commercial venture failed, but because of it we enjoy Lithia Park as we know it today.

The presence of mineral springs near Ashland was known to both the Indians and the early settlers. In 1907 a lithia water spring was discovered in Emigrant Creek four miles east of town and property owners G.H. Gillette and Harry Silver sent samples of the water to a San Francisco chemist. They were told that it had the second largest lithium content of any known springs in the world; only the famous health spas in Saratoga, New York, and in Carlsbad, Germany, offered the combination of health-giving minerals found in the water from Southern Oregon. Gillette and Silver built a bottling plant and sold water to visitors, to stores, and at a drink parlor they owned in town. They hoped to build a resort hotel and sanitarium at the spring, but at the time they lacked sufficient capital.

Bert Greer, a journalist who had worked for and owned newspapers in the Midwest and in Oklahoma, came to Ashland in 1911 and found a community of 3,500 people, a railroad center, the Chautauqua grove, and the beginnings of a larger park. He bought the semi-weekly *Ashland Tidings* and became interested in the mineral waters. Along with the lithia springs, he heard about the Murphy and Shepard soda springs, the Siskiyou mineral and the Tolman gas springs, all of them east of town. Within the city limits the Helman yellow sulphur and the Natatorium white sulphur springs had been converted into bathing pools. Just north of Ashland the Jackson hot sulphur spring produced a large volume of water, but was in a cattle pasture, undeveloped. Remarkable cures of rheumatism had been reported by the various sulphur owners, and many people drank Siskiyou mineral water for kidney problems. Lithia water was touted for treatment of stomach and kidney troubles, and the Tolman gas spring, equipped with an enclosure for gas baths, treated patients with heart ailments and skin diseases.

Greer began to talk about developing Ashland into a health resort similar to Saratoga or Carlsbad. He convinced members of the Ashland Commercial Club and other business-minded people that mineral water could offer the town a bright economic future.

The idea generated momentum. Interested people discussed the possibility of piping lithia, soda, and sulphur water to the not-yet developed park land, and of building commercial resort facilities there. Out at Emigrant Creek, however, the notion hit a snag. Gillette and Silver still wanted to develop a resort at their lithia springs if they could arrange the necessary financing. Attempts made by the Commercial Club to negotiate a lease for the lithia springs or arrive at an affordable purchase price failed. Unwilling to give up, the club appointed a committee to raise funds for exploration and to see if another spring, one on property which could be purchased by the city, could be located. In a week's time more than \$5,000 was subscribed, and the Mineral Springs Committee composed of J.P. Dodge, R.A. Minkler, and Bert Greer took charge of the work. Contracts were written with landowners in the mineral springs area east of town. On February 14, 1914, another lithia spring was located. Closer to town, it flowed about 30 gallons a minute and was highly charged with lithium.

Public meetings were held, and the San Francisco chemical engineering firm of Smith, Emery & Company was brought to Ashland to analyze the "health-giving benefits" of the water. Businessman Gwin S. Butler and Domingo Perozzi donated land for the venture adjacent to the park. Greer publicized their action as "the right spirit back of Ashland's great enterprise." Then a petition was submitted to the City Council asking that a bond issue in the amount of \$175,000 be authorized to finance the mineral springs development.

The proposal drew immediate opposition. Some folks suspected that promoters of the bond issue would receive a percentage of the selling price of the bonds; others objected to commercial development on land dedicated for park purposes. There were objections that piping the water to town would compete with the mountain resorts (privately owned springs already attracting some attention), and some said there was no proof a mineral water development would benefit Ashland and increase population, as the mineral springs proponents claimed.

Because the ordinance did not restrict the money to developing the mineral springs (it was written as an auxiliary water bond issue in hope that the bonds could be marketed at a lower rate),

opponents claimed the money could be expended for any water works purpose the Council desired. Some said the *Tidings*, which obviously favored the ideas of editor Greer and the two other members of the Mineral Springs Committee, was unfair in not printing opposing points of view. Others said the mineral water project was a worthwhile one but would never come to fruition unless the Mineral Springs Committee was legally elected and given the authority to supervise it.

In the *Tidings*, Greer announced that the Southern Pacific Railroad Company had shown "profound interest" in the enterprise, had offered the assistance of its engineering department and the support of its officials, and would give "free use of its entire advertising system for exploiting Ashland as a watering resort." He also pointed out that Ashland would benefit from the tourist trade generated by the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

The bond election was scheduled for June 8, 1914, and the last big promotional meeting was held with representatives of Smith, Emery & Company, E.O. McCormick of the Southern Pacific, and John McLaren, San Francisco superintendent of parks, as guests of honor. Songs were written for the occasion, and slogans such as "Ashland Grows While Lithia Flows" were chanted by the enthusiastic crowd. Proponents spoke of Ashland's brilliant future because of lithia and other mineral waters.

On election day, the ordinance providing for the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$175,000 carried by a vote of 1,206 to 308. (It was understood that \$110,000 would be used to bring soda, sulphur and lithia water into town, and \$65,000 would be used for fountains and to landscape park land. Resort development would come later.) Smith, Emery & Company was retained to do the water system work, and it was proudly announced that John McLaren*, who was responsible for the development of San Francisco's beautiful Golden Gate Park, would prepare a landscape plan for 16 to 18 acres of the undeveloped dedicated park land upstream from the Chautauqua Park.

*McLaren, born in 1846 on a farm in Scotland, learned the art of horticulture while working on various estates and at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. At age 23 he emigrated to the United States and moved to San Francisco where he established a reputation for his gardening, including conversion of wheat fields on the

Leland Stanford estate into the garden of ornamental plants which later became the botanic garden of Stanford University. In 1887 he was appointed Superintendent of Parks in San Francisco and became responsible for not only the city squares but also the development of a 1000-acre area of sand dunes, which in an earlier attempt had been named Golden Gate Park. His landscaping for the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 in San Francisco, immediately preceeding his work for Ashland, won international recognition and continues to delight park-goers.

His plan for Ashland Creek embodied the distinctive characteristics of park design established by Frederick Law Olmstead, a pioneer of municipal planning in the United States and the chief architect of Central Park in New York City in 1858. Olmstead and his associates are credited with laying the foundation of American landscape architecture which made the public park an integral part of urban life.

On June 23 a charter amendment was approved creating the official Mineral Springs Commission and giving the Commission control and authority over the development project until the initial \$175,000 was spent. J.P. Dodge, R.A. Minkler, and Bert Greer were elected to carry on the work they had begun.

Then an unforeseeable obstacle: the bonds didn't sell because of the war which had just broken out in Europe. At about the same time the bond attorneys discovered legal problems in the language of the ordinance. A charter amendment election to legalize the bonds was set for November 17, 1914.

"The results of this election will determine whether Ashland forges to the front, in spite of a few sleepy croakers, or whether she admits her domination by back-steppers and sinks hopelessly into a comatose state," Greer warned in the *Tidings*, referring, no doubt, to the opposition which surfaced again.

The charter amendment passed. The bonds were validated by a margin of five-to-one and offered on the national market to a number of bond houses, but only one bid was received, and its conditions were not acceptable.

In order to comply with the law, and at the same time proceed with the bond sale, the City Council agreed to advertise and hold the bonds, and the Mineral Springs Commission promised to bid them, with the stipulation that one year be allowed to sell them in small amounts locally unless the national market improved and the entire issue could be sold in a block. Smith, Emery & Company and several other contractors agreed to accept bonds in payment if necessary.

During all this financial maneuvering, the city Park Commission quietly included \$250 in its 1915 budget request for "trails, resting places and other improvements," and \$200 to develop a free auto camp for tourists in the upper park area.

Forty-eight Ashland businessmen formed a syndicate in January, 1915, and purchased the bond issue. (This was an interim move; by April all the bonds were sold to outside investors.) Smith, Emery & Company began construction of the auxiliary water system, which included pumping systems and laying pipeline from the springs to a central station in the park. Here the mineral water would be mixed and carbonated. Some would be bottled; the rest would flow through a distribution system to fountains in the park and at the railroad depot.

Ashland celebrated; parades and banquets boosted the mineral springs development under way at last. The Jackson County Court praised an effort being made by Col. Frank H. Ray of New York to use the Ashland venture as a way to interest eastern capitalists in Southern Oregon. "Private capital can make the Rogue River Valley the playground of the world, especially now that the European war has left thousands of tourists with no watering resort... All that is needed is private capital to grasp these opportunities," the Court said.

Meanwhile, the free auto camp developed by the Park Commission (it was located at the present Parks and Recreation Department office site) opened and drew many tourists to Ashland. Its opening coincided with the spread of paved highways throughout the region, and it was one of the first such facilities on the West Coast to cater to travelers. "Every tourist that camps here leaves an enthusiastic booster for Ashland," reported the *Tidings*, full of praise and complimentary comments about the campground.

Then it was discovered that the Mineral Springs Commission lacked authority to spend auxiliary water bond money for landscaping. Another charter amendment was necessary; another election was scheduled. Ashlanders may have been tired of elections and of the seemingly perpetual mineral springs issue during a time when other important matters faced the community. The turnout was light, but voters did approve the expenditure necessary to begin the landscaping of approximately 18 acres upstream from Chautauqua Park according to the plan McLaren delivered to Ashland.

Several parcels of privately owned land were purchased in order to unify the area being developed (controversy erupted over

whether or not the city would help with the cost of land acquisition; it did) and a number of old sheds and fences were torn down. More than 100 men worked to clear and level the land. As the landscaping began to take shape, people began to refer to this new area as Lithia Springs Park.

McLaren incorporated the natural features of Ashland Creek canyon, its granite boulders, and its native vegetation into the landscape plan, and he called for many additional trees.

"McLaren's motto was 'Trees and more trees'," explains Donn Todt, present park horticulturist. "Basically he was a plantsman. The fact we have many old, interesting trees is because he liked to plant things he couldn't grow in the Bay Area. The open spaces we have today are where he designated buildings."

The curve linear form of Lithia Park is similar to the form of Golden Gate Park, both of which are laid out informally with curves rather than angles. The roadway was included, as it was in Golden Gate Park, because the park was to be enjoyed from a car as well as by those who chose to walk.

A turnabout just below where the bandshell now stands provided a formal entrance to the Lithia Springs Park in 1915. The focal point was three octagonal, rustic pavilions under which large glass enclosures sheltered simulated natural mineral springs. Visitors could watch the water bubble and then draw it from a tap to drink. A rustic bandstand was built nearby.

McLaren designed a formal terrace to accommodate the Italian marble fountain which Gwin Butler and Domingo Perozzi purchased at the Panama-Pacific Exposition as their memorial gift to the new park. The fountain was the work of sculptor Antonio Frilli of Florence, Italy. Butler also gave a marble statue of Abraham Lincoln in memory of his stepfather, pioneer Jacob Thompson. It stood for many years on the grassy slope near the fountain.

The parkway, an extension of Mill Street (known today as Winburn Way), was laid out to curve gracefully past a new upper lake with an island. At the same time, a rose garden, Japanese garden, and sycamore grove were planted on the west side of the parkway*

*McLaren's landscaping plan may be studied at the office of the Parks and Recreation Department. It included space for a sanitarium and a casino; music concourse, handball courts, swimming pool, children's play house, aviary, and several other features, none of which were built. The Japanese garden has been rebuilt in recent years, and the rose garden was relocated in the 1930s.

Paths were built along the stream banks, simple footbridges spanned the creek, and rustic buildings carried the theme into the auto camp. A cave, dug 40 feet into the granite hillside just across the creek from where the tennis courts were built, provided the setting for a sulphur spring (piped in) which bubbled with warm and unpleasant-smelling water. At night the cave, which came to be known as Satan's Sulphur Grotto, was lighted with strings of blue lights which gave an eerie glow. Close by, a waterfall (piped in) spilled over a granite cliff into a rocky pool.

Columns of the *Tidings* were filled with puffery: "Park Enraptures Chinese Visitors," "Crowds Throng To New Lithia Park," "Cured By Lithia, Martin Leaves." A miniature lithia water spring was exhibited at the Panama-Pacific Exposition.

Landscape construction continued for more than a year, amidst a drawn-out and heated controversy over proposed commercial development and who would have control over Lithia Springs Park. In August, 1915, the city attorney asked the Park Commission to arrange to have all park lands mapped and suggested the Commission take charge and manage all of them, including those now being developed by the Mineral Springs Commission.

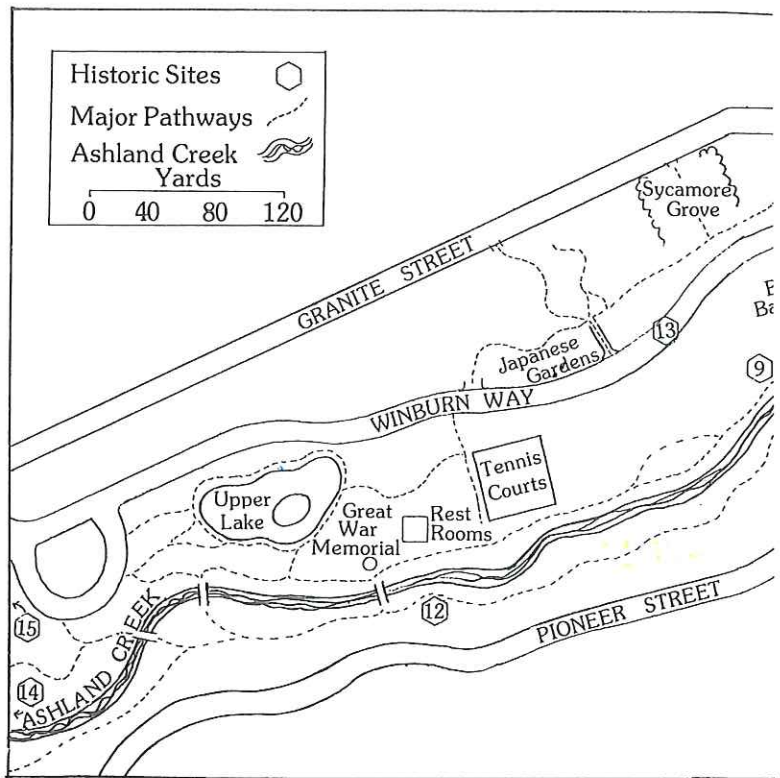
In November a jurisdictional dispute erupted when Chairman Greer of the Mineral Springs Commission said Lithia Spring Park should be made, at least part, self-supporting, and that "...everything in the park should be pointed toward that object." He asked that the Commission be given permanent jurisdiction, and that the change be decided during the annual election in December.

The City Council refused to submit the matter to voters.

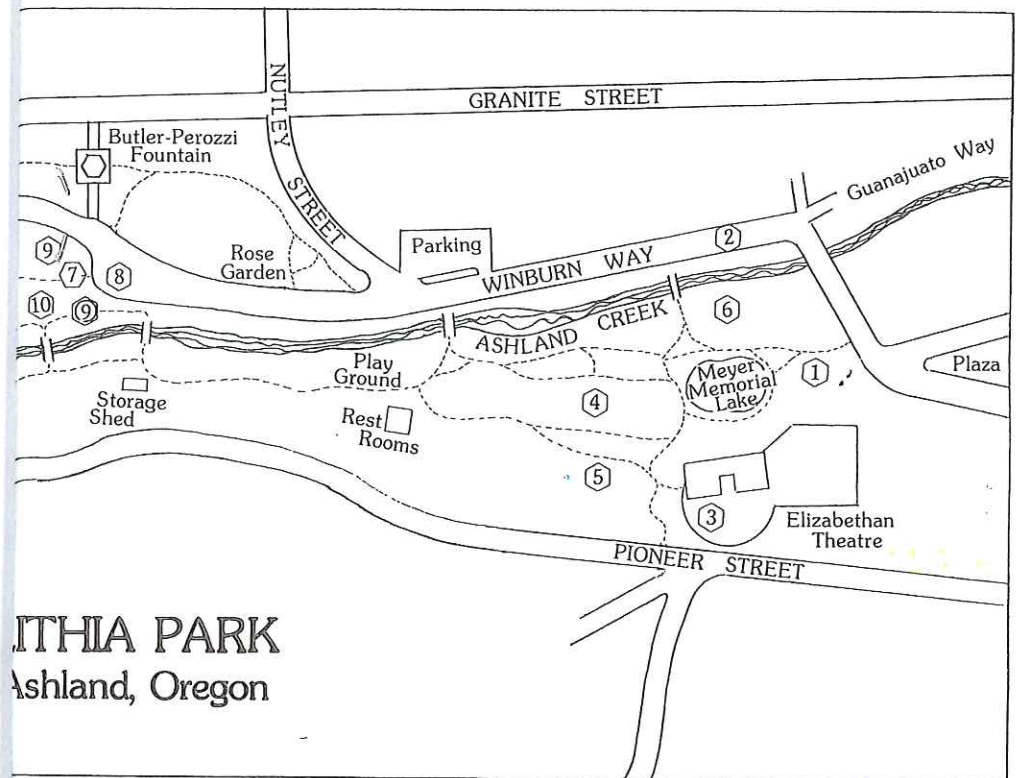
Official dedication of Lithia Springs Park was set for July 4, 5, and 6, 1916.

The Commercial Club appointed a committee to raise money and plan a gala three-day celebration. Queen Lithia and King Sulphur contests would be held, arrangements were made for special trains from Portland and San Francisco, movies of the park were shown in almost every town theater in Northern California and Oregon. Throughout the area, newspapers praised the beauty of Ashland's new park and the health-giving properties of the mineral waters.

Meanwhile, on May 19 the Council passed an ordinance giving control of Lithia Springs Park to the Park Commission. Greer refused to recognize the ordinance and announced that the



- ① Flouiring Mill, circa 1853
- ② Mill Street, circa 1853
- ③ Chautauqua Tabernacle, circa 1893
- ④ Chautauqua Grove, circa 1895
- ⑤ Chautauqua Path, circa 1895
- ⑥ City Park, circa 1910
- ⑦ Formal Entrance Lithia Springs Park, circa 1910
- ⑧ Turnabout, circa 1916



- ⑨ Mineral Water Pavilions, circa 1916
- ⑩ Rustic Band Stand, circa 1916
- ⑪ Mineral Water Central Station, circa 1916
- ⑫ Waterfall and Satan's Grotto, circa 1916
- ⑬ Parkway
- ⑭ Auto Camp, circa 1915
- ⑮ Zoo, circa 1920

Mineral Springs Commission intended to call for another election to let the people decide whether his group or the Park Commission should handle the resort features of the enterprise.*

Petitions were circulated demanding the recall of Greer; among other things, opponents questioned awarding the \$110,000 contract to Smith, Emery & Company without competitive bidding.* On June 29, 1916, the recall move was defeated 657 to 598, the margin so narrow, Greer insisted, because of a last-minute attack made in the churches against dancing in the Bungalow, an entertainment pavilion that had just opened across from the entrance to Lithia Springs Park.

Despite all the obstacles and rancor, the great day of the Lithia Springs Park dedication arrived at last. In order to involve all of Southern Oregon in the spectacular celebration, July 4, 1916, was declared Ashland Day, Sunday was Medford Day, and Monday was for Grants Pass and Klamath Falls. Dignitaries came from Portland and from San Francisco. There were parades, speeches, and music. The Butler-Perozzi fountain was formally dedicated. The extravaganza was a huge success with attendance for the three days estimated at 50,000.

There were a few problems. Feeding and housing the crowd were logistic nightmares. Every available bed, spare room, and hayloft in town was used. Chautauqua Park was filled to overflow with tents, as was the auto camp; many beds were spread in the open. Meals could not be served to so many, but sandwiches and light lunches were available. Newspapers in other parts of the state commented on the helpfulness and generosity of the citizens of Ashland.

In the *Tidings*, Greer said that the city benefitted financially, acquiring \$150,000 to \$200,000 in "good hard cash" and "was brought out of semi-lethargy to realize its possibilities."

*Greer argued that the charter amendment creating the Mineral Springs Commission gave it absolute control until the entire \$175,000 was spent and the final report filed. He claimed it was beyond the power of the City Council to change the jurisdiction until this was done.

*Two of Greer's most determined opponents were George Taverner, chairman of the Park Commission, and H.G. Enders, member of the Park Commission, both of whom were opposed to the way the project was being handled as well as to using city-owned park land to develop a commercial venture.

Good feelings and financial gain, however, couldn't eliminate the political problems. F.E. Watson resigned from the Park Commission in August, protesting the unfriendly attitude of some members of the City Council and the mayor. The *Tidings* published a proposed charter amendment that would abolish both the Park Commission and the Mineral Springs Commission, replace them both with a three-member Mineral Springs and Park Board, and provide a 3½ mill tax levy for care and upkeep of the parks and mineral water system. The newspaper charged that the Council and Park Commission didn't work in harmony, that the mineral springs group and the Council were at cross-purposes, and that the result was loss of dollars and lack of efficiency. The Council was asked to call a special election for September 22.

The Council tabled the request.

Proponents rewrote the amendment slightly and resubmitted it. The Council reconsidered, and election was set for November 24.

On November 23, the *Tidings* reported that "outside capitalists" were ready to build a \$50,000 sanitarium in Ashland, contingent upon satisfactory outcome of the election. The newspaper emphasized that the charter amendment was the "outgrowth of suggestion of outside investors" who would build the sanitarium only if the people of Ashland showed intent to stay behind the project in a positive manner.

Voters said no, 521 to 376; they intended to leave things the way they were.

On November 30, Editor Greer told the Council it might be possible to induce the investors to reconsider if the city could arrange to sell excess mineral water. Apparently the Council decided to give him one final chance to salvage the project. The ballot for the annual city election that December included three charter amendments: (1) Abolish the Mineral Springs Commission and give its power to the City Council, (2) Abolish the Park Commission and give its power to the City Council, (3) Grant to the Council, under certain restrictions, the right to lease surplus mineral water not needed for drinking purposes in Ashland, with the provision the water be used in a sanitarium for drinking, bathing and other medicinal purposes.

Voters abolished the Mineral Springs Commission, kept the Park Commission, and gave the Council the authority to dispose of the excess water. On January 1, 1917, the Mineral Springs Commission "bid adieu" in the *Tidings*. "...the life of the Mineral

Springs Commission ceases today," Greer wrote.*

The 24th annual Southern Oregon Chautauqua of 1916 presented fine programs for 12 days, but the season ended with a deficit of \$200. Directors decided that if the Chautauqua building first enlarged in 1905 could be rebuilt to seat even more people, the expanded building would pay for itself and eliminate future deficits as well. In order to help finance this project, the Chautauqua Association sold the Chautauqua grounds to the city for \$15,000, retaining only one acre on the hilltop where the new building was constructed. It was built on the circular concrete wall that encloses the Shakespearean Festival's Elizabethan theater today. Ashland's park was now contiguous from the Plaza to the auto camp. Without any formal attempt to give it a name, the entire area came to be called "Lithia Park."

The effort to turn Ashland into a mineral water spa was revived briefly in 1920 when Jesse Winburn, who amassed a fortune by introducing subway advertising in New York City, came to Ashland, bought a home in Ashland Creek canyon, and announced that he planned to invest in a resort business based on the area mineral waters, railroad, climate, and scenic beauty.

Rich and eccentric, Winburn gave the city many generous gifts. He thought swans would be a great attraction on the ponds in the park, so he imported six from Holland. The City Council renamed the street through the park Winburn Way in his honor. The Council also fined him regularly for grazing his animals on land that drained into Ashland Creek and for fishing in the stream that was the source of the city's drinking water. Winburn finally tired of being approached with ideas that needed financing and the constant complaints over his contamination of the water supply.

*Bert Greer left Ashland in 1919, but retained ownership of the Tidings leaving its daily operation under the control of a managing editor. He moved to Burbank, California, where he became the majority owner of the Burbank Review. In the Tidings centennial issue (June 17, 1976) writer Charley Blaine credited him with working to build the commerce of Burbank, and of inducing Warner Brothers Studio and Walt Disney to move to the San Fernando Valley. Greer died at age 62 in 1926 and asked not to be buried in Ashland. His name appears on the plaque dedicated to the memory of the founding fathers of Lithia Park, along with those of J.P. Dodge, and R.A. Minkler.

He dropped his projects and left town. The lithia water fountain we drink from today on the Plaza was installed, but little or no more effort was put into promoting Ashland as a mineral water spa. Ashland went on to other things.

During the 1920s, the Park Commission acquired additional land adjacent to the auto camp, improved camping facilities, and built a community house (now occupied by the Parks and Recreation Department office) and five cabins (one of the original cottages can be seen next to the office) which tourists could rent. The camp provided an income of about \$800 a month. The Commission bought a Ford truck for \$615. In 1922 Harris Dean was hired as park superintendent for \$100 a month*. A fenced area was provided for an elk brought from Eugene by the local Elks lodge, and the PTA purchased traveling rings for the playground. There was a merry-go-round, gift of Dr. F.G. Swedenburg. The Lithians, a booster club, held their initiation ceremonies in Satan's Sulphur Grotto, and the park was used regularly for reunions, large group picnics, and for Ashland's traditional Fourth of July celebration. A platform for open-air dancing was a popular summertime attraction where music was provided by local dance bands.

Interest in Chautauqua faded during this period. In Ashland, leaders changed, and the local tradition of offering a varied and meaningful program running for two full weeks lapsed. People now had automobiles and radios for entertainment.

The Chautauqua building was abandoned. The city of Ashland took it over in 1925 and assigned responsibility for its maintenance to the Park Commission. Eventually the dome was removed; nothing was left but the circular concrete walls inside of which weeds grew in profusion amid accumulations of trash.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, Ashland, along with the rest of the nation, did whatever it could to survive the Great Depression.

*Harris Dean was known as an expert on trees and other flora of the region. Before becoming park superintendent he had done much work in the park, including some of the original work on the McLaren plan. He succeeded E.J. Smith who had held the position for a year before resigning on account of poor health.

Lithia Park Matures

As the United States struggled to overcome the Depression, there were two events that would have a long-lasting impact on both the quality of life in Ashland and the feeling of community pride in Lithia Park. In 1935 Angus Bowmer, who taught English composition and public speaking at Southern Oregon Normal School (now Southern Oregon State College), looked at the abandoned Chautauqua shell and saw in it "...a peculiar resemblance to a drawing of the Globe Theatre of Shakespeare's London." Bowmer persuaded the city to include a three-day festival of Shakespearean plays as part of the Fourth of July festivities that year. Bowmer himself would be producer/director of the "festival". On a small stage built inside the cement walls of the old Chautauqua building, he and his dedicated cast presented "Romeo and Juliet" on July 2 and 4, "The Merchant of Venice" on July 3. To the amazement of many, the brief festival was a success, and in this inauspicious way the Oregon Shakespearean Festival began.

The second important happening occurred in November when Chester E. Corry was hired as assistant park superintendent. The next year he created the landscape design for the Root Memorial Area -- a gift of former Councilman and Mrs. C.W. Root of more than 19 acres upstream from the auto camp -- and supervised the landscaping project carried out by a Works Progress Administration crew. This action expanded the developed area of Lithia Park still further up the canyon. The path near the Parks and Recreation Department office building will take you there today.

Chet Corry made a number of changes. He diverted Ashland Creek in two places to form a large pool, trickling falls, and gentle rapids; he built an island for campfire parties. He searched the mountains for colorful native plants and brought to the park dogwood, mock orange, wild rose, sumac, Western wall flowers from Mt. Lassen, wild columbine, wild rock garden plants and ferns. He also established a park nursery so he could grow plants as needed.

When Harris Dean retired in 1937 after a 15-year career with the park, Chester Corry was named superintendent.* For the next 32

*Corry grew up near Glendora, California, where his father owned an orange grove. He graduated from Oregon State College in 1930

with a B.S. in landscape design, worked on some of the new ocean-front Palos Verdes estates in California during the height of the Depression, in roadside beautification at Mt. Lassen National Park, and as a landscape architect for Lambert Gardens in Portland before he came to Ashland.

years he created all the landscape designs for Lithia Park. Of his work, Faith McCullough, *Medford Mail Tribune* writer, wrote in later years: "Long acquaintance with growing things has given Chester Corry a philosophical view of life as well as a sense of obligation to the youth of today. For them he would preserve experiences that are now so seldom enjoyed in an urban community. The simplicity of woods and hills unspoiled by man's sophisticated plans for progress is a goal kept constantly in mind by the landscape artist."

The Root gift of land also included the flat triangular plot lying just below the Butler-Perozzi fountain, near where Nutley Street was being extended to join Winburn Way. Corry turned what had been a bramble patch into a wide expanse of tree-shaded lawn and the rose garden we enjoy today. Stone steps were built above the fountain to provide an entrance to the park from Granite Street.

The Plaza entrance and the Chautauqua park area -- worn from use and never unified in design -- were replanted under a WPA project in 1938. The playground was enlarged, new bridges replaced old structures, paths were extended. Corry also developed a small zoo near the elk pen. He and his wife, Doris, raised orphan fawns brought to them by police or forest workers and several that were born to the small herd living in the park.

During World War II Lithia Park was a lively community center, the scene of bond rallies and patriotic gatherings. Maintenance continued, but Ashland's primary energies during these years were devoted to the war effort. Changes were inevitable. One of the mineral water fountains had been destroyed years earlier by a falling tree, and Corry removed another when it became impossible to keep the sulphur water running. The central mineral water mixing station, at the head of the long flight of cement stairs that remain in the park today, was abandoned, the building was used briefly as a Boy Scout headquarters, then razed as a safety measure. The famous Satan's Sulphur Grotto became a dumping place for trash, and the waterfall cut into the decomposed granite hillside. Both were filled and covered. Vandalism and the cost of repair made it impossible to keep the Butler-Perozzi fountain flow-

ing, and vandals eventually destroyed the statue of Abraham Lincoln.

In the postwar period the Ashland economy improved, but revenues never matched the financial need. Corry did private landscape work for a period of time as well as taking care of the park in order to survive on the money available for the superintendent's salary. Most park improvements were possible only because of generous gifts. A bequest provided in the will of Gwin Butler was used to build the Butler Memorial Band Shell, replacing the old bandstand and its poor accoustics, and to enlarge the playground. A section of Ashland Creek was paved to provide a safe and clean wading pool for children with the gift of another Ashland businessman, Harry Harrison. Eventually the auto camp, rundown and no longer economical to operate, was phased out.

The Shakespearean Festival company re-grouped after the war and began its steady and major expansion. Corry landscaped the outdoor theater when it was rebuilt in 1959. Because the theater drew an increasing number of visitors to Ashland, and local population was growing, he encouraged the Park Commission to develop other parks so Lithia Park could remain a passive park.* Along with the Commission, he stood firm against commercialization.

There was a new problem in the 1960s when counter-culture people moved into Lithia Park flaunting a lifestyle that angered many local folks. The problem was not resolved; community people simply endured and for a time retreated from the park, one of their favorite places.

Chet Corry retired in February, 1969 and Jean Eberhart was named park superintendent. Corry became a landscape consultant for the city and helped with the landscaping of the Bowmer Theatre when it was built in 1970. He redesigned the lower lake, a project made possible through the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Meyer after they returned to Ashland to retire in his boyhood home town. Eberhart died unexpectedly in January, 1971, and

*The city park system also includes Guanajuato Way, named for Ashland's sister city in Mexico; Bluebird Park, developed by the Ashland Garden Club and the Bluebird (Campfire) group; Hunter Park, made possible through the gift of George and Julie Hunter, who came here in the 1950s from Chicago to retire; Garden Way Park, developed by the Soroptimist Club of Ashland; Sherwood Park, Clay Street Park, and several smaller parks.

Corry returned as an interim superintendent; he designed the Eberhart Memorial Area.*

Between 1971 and 1979 Lithia Park had two short-term superintendents and a multitude of problems. There was no administrative continuity and very little money for protection of the grounds. The Shakespearean Festival grew still more, Ashland was "discovered" by the traveling public, and the multitudes flocked to Lithia Park. Nature, too, brought change.

After unusually warm temperatures in the Siskiyou Mountains during Christmas week of 1974, the snowpack at the head of Ashland Creek canyon melted, and the park, the Plaza, and everything downstream were hit with a devastating flood. Bridges were washed out, and water cut deep channels through park lawns and flower beds. Floodwaters raged down Winburn Way and swept over the park entrance and the Plaza.

Everyone cared about the park. Even before the water receded, people came with axes and chainsaws to help clean up. The city began restoration work and applied for federal disaster relief assistance. Ashland voters authorized a flood restoration bond issue. The largest single amount of the \$400,000 was spent to replace earth and vegetation in the park and rebuild paths and roads. Individuals and groups gave money generously to replace footbridges and other structures not eligible for restoration funds. The combination of gifts, bonds, and federal funding was sufficient to repair damage to the park and other city facilities with very little impact on taxes, but the added financial pressure left the Park Commission without any operating funds. The City Council agreed to loan what was needed to pay the bills, and an austerity program was adopted.

Kenneth Mickelsen was hired as Director of Parks and Recreation in February, 1979.* With a new director, two new commissioners, a new perspective, and the debt to the city repaid, the Park Commission reinstituted its charter authority and control over its budget.

*The Cotton Memorial Area nearby, also designed by Corry, was built in 1966 after the death of Park Commissioner John C. Cotton. The Braille Nature Trail, gift of the Ashland Lions Club, is in memory of Dr. Elmo N. Stevenson, president of Southern Oregon College, 1946-1969.

*Mickelsen graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in social work. He worked as recreation director in Brookings, South Dakota, and as director of parks and recreation in Watertown, South Dakota, before coming to Ashland.

Heavy use, age, and the natural process of deterioration had left Lithia Park looking tired and worn. Its ecosystem was endangered, and many of its unique features were threatened. The new director and the Commission set as their major immediate goal the revitalization and protection of the park.

Through a series of public meetings, community involvement, and many hours of consideration of alternatives, a ten-phase plan was developed for restoration of the area from the Plaza entrance to the upper lake. A landscape architect was hired to develop a master plan, but when the cost estimate of completing it was placed at \$2.5 million, the plan was set aside. Using elements from this plan, the Commission and director established their own plan and proceeded to do the work for substantially less money and, with gifts and grants, stay within the tax levy.

The Park Commission established several principles to protect Lithia Park: there should be no new structures, money for maintenance must be assured, and there should be no commercial enterprises. The director was given the authority to hire a park superintendent and horticulturist, people with special skills to oversee specific functions.*

Long-term solutions were emphasized with high-quality workmanship and the finest materials expected to last between 50 and 100 years. Of primary concern was finding a way to maintain a passive park in a wilderness setting when the area was visited by half a million people each year.

Working with the Commission on landscape design and maintenance decisions, the park staff crew launched the renovation work. The first priority was to rebuild the upper lake, the paths, and the stonework, and to redesign and plant the flower beds around it. Then the worn grass in the lower park was replaced with sand-based lawns similar to those used for professional athletic fields.

The public became extremely protective as new lawns and flower beds took shape. Rock walls were built to enhance new

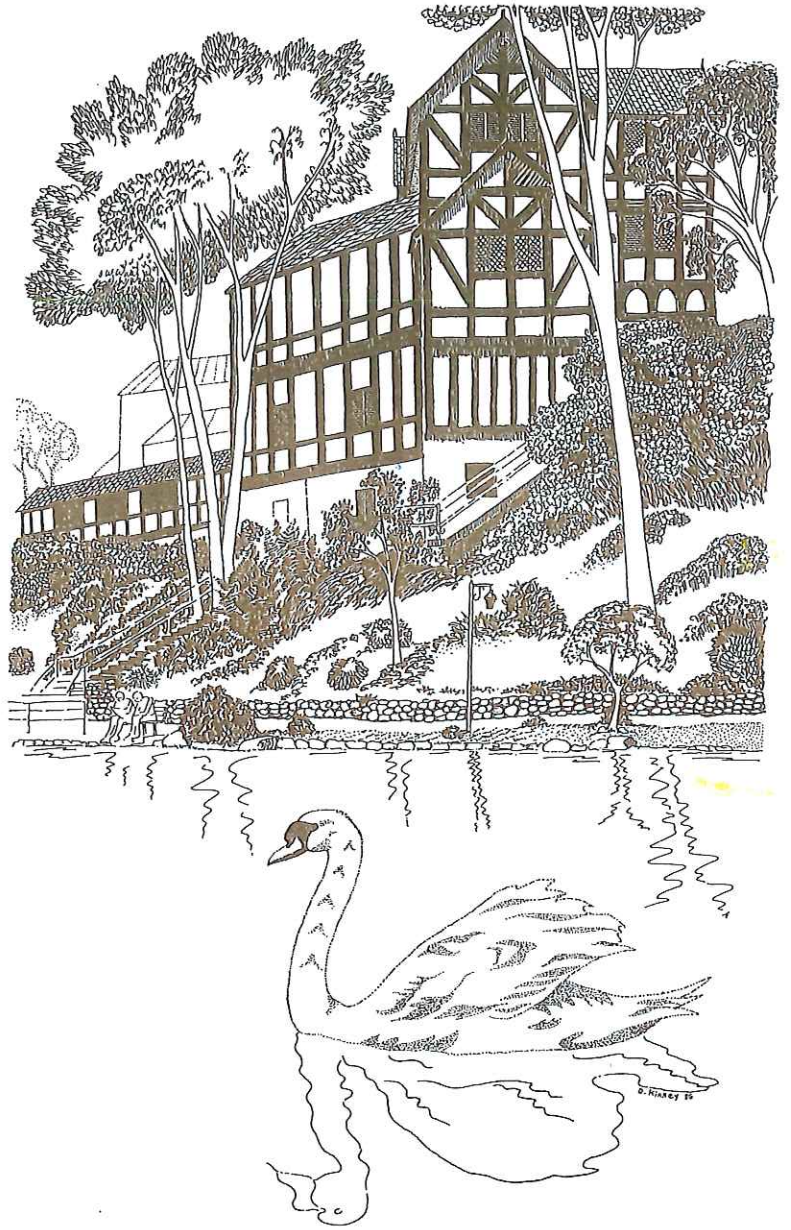
*Park Superintendent Steven Gies graduated with a B.S. degree in park administration from California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, and worked as a park ranger for the Riverside County (California) Parks Department before coming to Ashland. Horticulturist Donn Todt received his B.A. degree in biology from the University of Colorado, participated in the vocational program in horticulture at Utah State, and earned a Master's degree in outdoor education from Southern Oregon State College.

plantings, and paths were surfaced with exposed aggregate so they would blend but not erode under heavy traffic. A complete new irrigation system was installed, and an intensive pruning and tree development program was begun. Proper storage buildings replaced inadequate sheds, and the department office was moved to the former community building in the upper park. Three large memorial bequests by Edward F. Wolter, Jesse G. Anderson, and George Brinkworth paid for much of the work and provided matching funds needed to qualify for federal grants covering other costs. A private memorial gift made it possible to develop the graceful west slope Japanese garden. Many smaller gifts funded trees, rhododendrons, and other plants for the new areas (The Ashland Park and Recreation Commission has established a special fund to accept gifts). The Ashland Historic Commission undertook a successful effort to raise \$35,000 to restore the Butler-Perozzi fountain. The upper park was left in its natural state.

Today, the Chautauqua Tabernacle is a fading memory. Standing proud and vital in its place on the sloping hillside above the Plaza is the Oregon Shakespearean Festival's complex of theaters and administrative offices. There is no mineral water spa; lithia water is simply a drink from a fountain, tasted on dare by the young, cautiously by the curious, and with enthusiasm only by those who think of it as a delightful refreshment or an anti-depressant.

In Ashland, old dreams have been replaced by new ones. If there is, however, a special enchantment about the place that provokes dreams and fantasies as some people may suggest, perhaps you will discover it for yourself while walking along the shady banks of Ashland Creek through beautiful Lithia Park.

end



Parks and Recreation Commission, 1986

Jean Crawford, president

L. B. (Bernie) Sears

Gary Nelson

Dennis Johnson

Pat Adams

Parks and Recreation Department, 1986

Kenneth Mickelsen, director

Steven Gies, park superintendent

Ann Benedict, secretary

Donn Todt, horticulturist

John Orr

Eric Setterberg

Ron Farquhar

Harvey Haight

Barbara Taylor

Jeff McFarland

Vince Oredson

Dave Wieczorek

Major reference sources for this booklet include, "*The Story of Chautauqua In Southern Oregon*, as recalled by Homer Billings, 1959; *The Lithia Park Story*, by Charles Eldon Scriptor, 1952; *National Register of Historic Places nomination form*, 1981; *Ashland: The First 130 Years*, by Marjorie O'Harra, 1982; Park Commission minutes, 1909 to date; Ashland Tidings (microfilm) files at Southern Oregon State College Library and Ashland Public Library, and miscellaneous letters and documents in the Lithia Park History file in the office of the Parks and Recreation Department. Photocopies of more than 250 stories printed in the *Ashland Tidings*, 1914-1917, are also on file in the park department office.

