

Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool: History

Geology

- 11,700 years ago – Wisconsinian ice sheet melts, leaving behind Glacial Lake Chicago.
- 1000 years ago -- Glacial Lake Chicago retreated to become the Lake Michigan of today.
 - The current Michigan Avenue was a beach extending all the way to Clark Street.
 - Alternate ridges of sand and swales/wetland of lower ground. Poison ivy grew over a great part of the tract, with occasional clumps of willows and scrub oaks.
 - Plaques or markers identifying the position of ancient lake beaches are located southeast of the Deming Place Bridge near Stockton Drive and near the sidewalk east of the center of North Pond.

Chicago City/Lily Pool History

1837

Land owned by the State of Illinois ceded to Chicago for a burial ground. Bodies were buried in the Cemetery from North Avenue Northward to what is now Armitage.

1860-65

The Common Council for the Park ordered the northern half of the cemetery to be converted to a public park. Originally known as Lake Park, landscape gardener Swain Nelson designed the original 60-acre park, and the City named the site Lincoln Park (in memory of Abraham Lincoln).

1869

Creation of Lincoln Park Commission, establishing a board and taxing district for the improvement and maintenance of Lincoln Park with new boundaries extending from Diversey to North Avenue. Most of the land in the area that later became the Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool was originally part of two privately owned parcels- the Bass/Adams Tract and the Newberry Tract. Bodies were disinterred from the cemetery and moved to other locations.

1875

The Lincoln Park Commissioners took possession of the land that became the Lily Pool.

1889

An unused ravine was transformed into a lily pond, artificially heated for the growth of exotic water lilies. According to a *Chicago Tribune* article dated 9/15/1889, "Although the lily ponds in Lincoln Park have only been in existence since last spring, their surfaces are adorned with rich foliage, and gorgeous blossoms of many hues, forming in fact, one of the most interesting and attractive features to be found in the park."

1895

The lilies were hard to cultivate, and the pools became unsightly. They were called "Pettigrew's frog ponds" in reference to Lincoln Park's Superintendent John Pettigrew.

1897

A request came from the financial advisor of the Khedive of Egypt requesting seeds from the Lincoln Park water lilies, some of which had been imported from Egypt.

1934

Chicago's 22 independent park districts were consolidated into the Chicago Park District.

1936-1940

Alfred Caldwell worked as a senior landscape draftsman in the Chicago Park District

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Engineering Department's Landscape Division.

1936

The Works Progress Administration ("WPA") provided federal funds for Lincoln Park improvements including replacing the dilapidated Victorian lily pool with a new lily pool.

1936-1937

Caldwell designed plans for the Lily Pool. He later described it as "a sanctuary of the native landscape, a place sequestered from Megalopolis, the jungle of profound ugliness; a cool, refreshing, clear place of trees and stones and running water— an exposition, in little, of the structure of the land. It was planned as a hidden garden of the people of Megalopolis."

1937-1938

The Chicago Park District constructed the Lily Pool.

1946

At the request of the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Chicago Park District renamed the Lily Pool the Zoo Rookery, and it became an exhibit for pelicans, flamingoes and other exotic fowl.

1948

Music (Beethoven to popular dance music) from records and FM radio was projected from a speaker in the center of the Zoo Rookery.

1967-68

Severe erosion problems caused by the zoo birds inspired the CPD to renovate the Rookery, adding tons of additional stonework.

1990

Alfred Caldwell visited the Lily Pool for the first time in many years and was distressed when he saw its terrible state of decline. He described the landscape as "a dead world."

1994

Lincoln Park was listed in its entirety as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

1997

The Chicago Park District and the Lincoln Park Conservancy (formerly Friends of Lincoln Park) developed a restoration plan to return the Lily Pool to Caldwell's design. The Lincoln Park Conservancy raised \$1.1 million in private funds for the restoration and the Chicago Park District matched with an additional \$1.3 million.

1998

Alfred Caldwell died. The Lincoln Park Conservancy adopted the Lily Pool as their next restoration project. Planning began with the Chicago Park District.

2000-2002

The Chicago Park District and the Lincoln Park Conservancy supervised the Lily Pool construction. It was renamed the Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool.

2003

The Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool was designated a Chicago Landmark.

2004

The Chicago Park District and Lincoln Park Conservancy launched the docent program at the Lily Pool.

2006

The Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool is designated as a National Historic Landmark.

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Alfred Caldwell History

- 1903, born in St. Louis. He moved to Chicago with his family as a young child.
- At Lakeview High School he was greatly influenced by his science teacher Dr. Hermann Silas Pepon. An accomplished botanist, Dr. Pepon was the author of *An Annotated Flora of the Chicago Region* (still a classic of Illinois Botany, nearly 100 years later) and “inspired him with the wonders of nature.”
 - Caldwell also studied Latin, a skill he later used when he prepared detailed planting plans that included both Latin and popular names.
- Caldwell enrolled at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. He soon became disillusioned with school, quit, and eloped with his sweetheart, his cousin Virginia (aka Geda).
- 1924-1930, Caldwell worked with Jens Jensen. Jensen provided the vision, education, and guidance that Caldwell had been seeking. Caldwell oversaw landscape construction, often making his own decisions in the field, that Jensen would later review.
 - Caldwell learned firsthand how native plants, sun openings, water and rock could poetically convey the spirit of Midwestern natural prairies. He observed Jensen’s ways of heightening the experience of each season, his masterful use of light and shadow, and planting selections and designs that would attract birds. He listened carefully as Jensen spoke about ecology, natural systems, and the need to conserve the region’s undeveloped lands. According to Caldwell, Jensen “became the great symbol of my life.”
 - Through Jensen, Caldwell met Frank Lloyd Wright, the Prairie School architect who proved to be another great influence.
- 1933, Caldwell assisted George Donahue, General Superintendent of Chicago’s South Park Commission on projects funded by the Civil Works Administration (precursor to the Works Progress Administration).
- 1934-1936, Caldwell worked on Eagle Point Park, Dubuque Iowa, which he called the “City in a Garden.” The design was “a conceptual realization of his fundamental belief in the unity of man and nature.” Many of the features of the Lily Pool appeared here first.
 - Despite the brilliance of Caldwell’s design and his deep commitment to the project, Caldwell was not well liked in Dubuque and was fired in 1936, while Eagle Point Park was still under construction.
 - Alfred, Geda, and their two small children returned to Chicago, penniless.
- 1936, Donahue hired Caldwell as a senior landscape draftsman for the newly formed Chicago Park District. Luke Cosme, an engineer who sat near Caldwell recalled that “everyone recognized Caldwell’s ability, and though he was a loner and difficult to get along with, there was often a line of people leading to his desk.”
- 1938, hoping for a promotion to landscape designer, Caldwell took a Civil Service Examination. On the bottom of his exam, he wrote a note criticizing the test and its authors. His superiors failed him, and he was ineligible for the promotion. Two years later, he retook the exam and received one of the highest marks.
- Between 1936 and 1940 Caldwell quit and/or was fired from the Chicago Park District a few times, but because of his knowledge of plants, his wonderful design skills, and his

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ability to produce detailed plans at a relatively fast pace, Caldwell was in demand and worked on many large and high-profile projects.

- Of all of Caldwell's Chicago park work, the redesign of a Victorian lily pool in Lincoln Park provided him with the greatest opportunity to fully convey his philosophies.
 - Well before the creation of Lincoln Park, the site was composed of natural glacial ridges on the east and west sides and a lower swale in the center. For the most part, these ridges remained when the Lincoln Park Commissioners installed the Victorian lily pool in the late 1880s.
 - The hour-glass shaped pond and its surrounding landscape of the original lily pool were completely dilapidated when the park district asked Alfred Caldwell to redesign it.
 - This project allowed Caldwell to create the kind of quiet and introspective space that he believed city dwellers needed. It was also an opportunity to create a site symbolic of a natural Midwestern landscape.
 - The prairie river, waterfall, council ring, stone paths and ledges, and use of native plants are all landscape design elements that reflect Jens Jensen's influence on Caldwell.
 - Frank Lloyd Wright's influence on Caldwell can be seen in the designs of the Fullerton gate and pavilion, specifically the emphasis on horizontality, earthy colors and materials, relationship between the architecture and natural setting, and Japanese quality.
- Caldwell recognized that the Lily Pool and other Chicago park projects presented him with a unique opportunity to realize his design ideas but at times, the young idealistic designer had to accept the alterations or changes made to his plans.
 - In 1938, towards the end of the construction of the Lily Pool, the Park District decided to cut the majority of the wildflower plantings from the budget for the Lily Pool. Years later, Caldwell recalled:
 - So not to be beat, I talked it over with my wife. I had recently taken out an insurance policy for \$5,000 dollars. I cashed in my insurance policy. I got \$250 dollars. I went up to Wisconsin. I hired a truck. I had three or four people and they worked like mad for a whole day and a half. I loaded all these thousand and thousands of plants. I loaded them and brought them in all the way from Sauk County, Wisconsin. When I got back to the Lincoln Park Lily Pond, it was 6:00 pm on a Saturday night. We spread all the stuff out on the side of the slopes where they were to go. In the morning we planted them all. We finished the whole thing by 1:00 or 2:00 p.m. The lily pond was finished. The juneberry trees were in blossom. It was like paradise.
 - Later, on the day he planted the wildflowers at the Lily Pool, three mysterious men in black overcoats were looking closely at the site's details. As the men studied the pavilion at the Lily Pool, Caldwell approached. They pointed to the pavilion and asked, "Frank Lloyd Wright?" He thumped himself on the chest and replied, "No, Alfred Caldwell."
 - The three men left, and it wasn't until a couple of years later when Caldwell attended an evening class on architectural design at the Art Institute of Chicago

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that he realized that the instructors were the three men who had admired the details of the Lily Pool: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig Hilberseimer and Walter Peterhans, the famous Bauhaus architects and planners who fled Nazi Germany to settle in Chicago to teach at the Armour Institute (now Illinois Institute of Technology).

- Caldwell became particularly close with Hilberseimer, who encouraged Caldwell to begin teaching. Although Alfred had never had a formal education, he worked as a professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology from 1945 to 1960, and later taught at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and the University of Southern California. (Caldwell was awarded a Master's of Science in City Planning from the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1948 and an honorary doctorate in 1988).
- In addition to his teaching career, Caldwell worked on landscape design, planning, and architectural projects throughout the rest of his life.
 - Caldwell designed a private park for Chicago's Lake Point Tower, a residential skyscraper inspired by Mies and produced by two of his former employees, Schipporeit & Heinrich.
 - Caldwell's dearest project was the design and construction of his own property, which he called "the farm" in Bristol, Wisconsin.

Garden styles

- Beaux Arts Style landscape (c.1830s) - a combination of classical Roman and Greek, flamboyant French and Italian Renaissance and Baroque, and Islamic-era Spanish styles. Characterized by long vistas, the gardens relied on balance and symmetry, elegant fountains and statues, and formal geometry to create "rooms."
- English Country Garden/English Landscapes (c.1850s) - this style sought to "imitate the flow, foliage, and apparent casualness of the unspoiled landscapes," and arose in response to the formal traditions that preceded it. Significant landscape American architects of the period included Fredrick Law Olmsted.
 - Olmsted and his sons designed parks on Chicago's south side (Jackson, Midway Plaisance, Washington Park), where he mixed exotics with native plants and incorporated the curving lines of the English style.
 - In the late 1800's and early 1900's Ossian Cole Simonds and Jens Jenson continued this tradition by deliberately incorporated natives into the landscapes of Graceland Cemetery (Simonds) the Western Parks (Humboldt, Garfield, Douglas parks – Jensen). Simonds, as a consultant, also added these long vistas, curved lines, and native plants to the expanding Lincoln Park.
- Prairie Style Landscaping (c.1915) – celebrated the open character, horizontal expanse, and native vegetation of the American Midwest. Landscape spaces were organized as a sequence of outdoor rooms and views, emphasizing the interaction of sky and landscape.