

Quarry Hill Park Historical Guide



**Quarry Hill Nature Center is
a cooperative effort of:**

**School District # 535
City of Rochester Parks and Recreation
Friends of Quarry Hill Nature Center Incorporated**

Information contained in this booklet came from Quarry Hill Historical Hike: A Self Guided Tour by Martha Y. Hoag, In Years Gone By, and Landscapes of the Past written by Quarry Hill Enrichment Class students. Additional information and editing was provided by past and present Quarry Hill Nature Center staff.

GEOLOGIC HISTORY OF THE PARK

Quarry Hill has a very long and rich human, as well as natural history. Millions of years ago, during the Ordovician Period of the Paleozoic Era, this Park and surrounding areas in SE Minnesota, were covered by an ocean inhabited by many sea-dwelling creatures. It is their fossils that remain in the Platteville limestone found in the Park quarry today. Commonly found fossils include the following:



Brachiopod



Trilobite



Cephalopod



Gastropod

HUMAN HISTORY OF QUARRY HILL PARK

For almost one hundred years, prior to 1965, the land now called Quarry Hill Park was owned by the Rochester State Hospital and used as a worksite for many of the patients who farmed the land, mined the quarry, and milked the cows, along with many other tasks needed to run this self-sufficient, city-like hospital.



In 1965 the City of Rochester purchased the original 212 acres of Quarry Hill Park for \$21,200 from the State. In 1972 a nature center was built through a community-wide fundraising effort spearheaded by the local Kiwanis Club, as well as other organizations, students, and families. Upon completion of the original Quarry Hill Nature Center structure, a cooperative agreement was written between the City, which owns the land, and the Rochester Public Schools (which originated and continues to fund a large segment of the Nature Center environmental science education program). A non-profit corporation, now called the Friends of Quarry Hill Nature Center Incorporated, was formed in 1985 to help provide private funds for Quarry Hill programs. Since that time, the Friends of Quarry Hill have become a major part of funding and providing programs at Quarry Hill. The programs and activities at Quarry Hill include on-site classes for school groups (first class held in 1972), the Annual Fall Festival, Summer Nature Camps, as well as general public classes. As the park usage continued to expand over the years, so did the facilities. A major addition to the nature center was completed in 1990, followed by a second addition in 1998. In 2002 a pavilion was built next to the pond. Fundraising efforts for all of these additions were led by the Friends of Quarry Hill. As the Nature Center grew in size, so did the actual park land acreage. In 1993, 1998 and 2001 additional acreage was purchased with funding from the Friends of Quarry Hill, the City of Rochester, and the State of Minnesota, increasing the original Park size of 212 acres to 314 acres.



Nature Center in 1989



Nature Center in 2002

DROP STRUCTURE

In 1934 the Civilian Conservation Corps built a stone wall drop structure, which was later restored in 1989, by the Rochester Park and Recreation Department. The purpose of this structure is to control the run-off water from the hills and the meadow to the north by allowing the water to fall into Silver Creek without eroding its channel. This structure was made up of a dike and a rock apron to channel the water from a ditch or waterway, which had been dug through the center of the meadow. This was an early conservation effort to prevent the erosion of the soil from the farm fields. You can still see the waterway as you look to the north across the meadow. Without the drop structure the meadow would likely have a wide gully running through it.



HARRY L. BUCK CHILDREN'S POND



In 1978 a pond was dug in the meadow just west of the Nature Center. Prior to the construction of the pond, the area was actively “under the plow” from the mid 1800s until near the end of the 1960s. The approximately two-acre pond serves many purposes. It acts as an educational study area. A number of animals make the pond their home, such as, dragonflies, muskrat, turtles, ducks, geese, fish, and plankton. Many other animals visit the Pond. The tracks of raccoon and deer can regularly be seen along the pond’s bank. It is also a convenient place for the young and old alike to fish or just relax. In 1984 a floating bridge, running east-west across the pond was erected

by the Redeemer Lutheran Church Men’s Club. A second bridge purchased with Community Block Grant funds replaced it in 2002.

QUARRY

The limestone quarrying operation left behind several of the stone structures found within the Park. In 1885 the quarry opened up with labor provided by two State Hospital employees and 25 to 55 patients. The quarry was started to provide Platteville limestone for the construction of many of the State Hospital buildings. These buildings included the barn at the old farmstead, as well as the soap house, slaughterhouse, bridge, poultry house, fireplace, and several of the structures found within the quarry itself. It was also a source of revenue for the hospital, as the stone was sold to the community.



An interesting incident drew the FBI to this site in the 1930s. Someone had broken into the dynamite house and stolen a box of dynamite. A special train bringing Franklin D. Roosevelt to town was due the next day. No incident occurred, although there were many uneasy moments and greatly increased security within the region. The missing dynamite was never found.

Rock Crusher

In 1900 the state appropriated \$800 to buy a rock crusher. This enabled the quarry to provide crushed rock that was used as a gravel substitute for improving roads. Another rock crusher was added in 1912 to meet the increased demand for crushed rock by local contractors, as well as increased use by the Hospital. Saint Mary's Hospital, the Kahler Hotel, and the 1928 Plummer Building are among those built with materials from this site. In 1934 a pulverizer was added to meet the need for limestone dust by farmers. Rock prices were quite a bargain: crushed rock for \$1.25/yard and limestone dust at \$.75 a ton.



Rock Crusher Towers

The crushing operation ended in 1950. The crusher and pulverizer were destroyed in 1955, because the buildings and towers were thought to be a hazard to children who played in the area. Parts of the rock crusher structure can still be found at the top of the hill at the southeast end of the quarry. The remains consist of two large pillars of stone. These pillars were where small rail cars carrying rock were drawn to by cable and dumped into the crusher.

Compressor

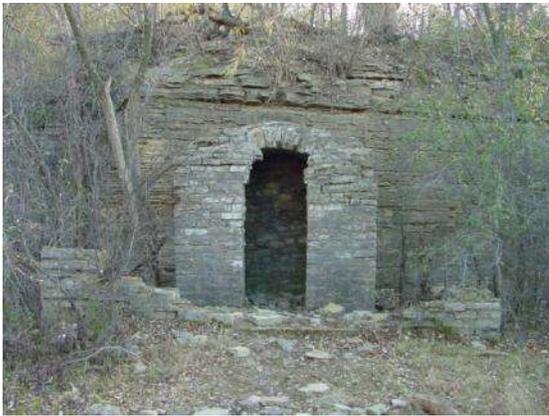
The compressor was used to run the quarrying equipment and to pump out water that ran into the quarry when it rained. All that remains of the compressor now is the base, located in the southeast end of the quarry.



Compressor Base (right)

Cap Shack

The cap shack was constructed for safety purposes. It was designed to store the dynamite blasting caps in an area away from the dynamite sticks. The shack itself was made of cement and had a small iron door. What is left of the cap shack is located against the east wall of the quarry floor.



Cap Shack (right)



Dynamite Shack (left)

Dynamite Shack

Dynamite was used to obtain rock from the quarry. The process included drilling a hole in the rock and inserting dynamite. The explosion caused rock to loosen from the quarry wall. At this point, the rock was primarily handled by the workers who loaded it into small gauge railroad cars which were pushed to the crusher. It is believed tracks for these cars were picked up by the quarry crew and moved to different areas of the quarry wall as blasting took place. The dynamite shack, which held the dynamite to be used in the quarry, is still standing today at the south side of the quarry. When it was built, the wall in front of it stood six feet tall. The shack probably could have held four to five tons of dynamite.

FIREPLACE

A fireplace may be found along the blacktop trail near the cave area. The fireplace was built of stone from the quarry and used by patients and staff from the State Hospital. The fireplace was built around 1936 on the site of what was formerly a landfill for Hospital glass and cans. Once cleaned up, the area was converted to a picnic area and the patients used the fireplace to cook over, and perhaps warm up around. At one time a faucet that supplied water to this area from the reservoir was to the right of the fireplace.



CAVE

The cave was carved in 1882 to serve as a cellar for the storage of many vegetables grown on the State Hospital farm. A crew of six men from the State Hospital dug the series of caves out of St. Peter sandstone. One of the patients, a man by the name of Thomas Coyne, led this crew. Coyne was a poet, as evidenced by the lines of poetry he carved into the walls of the cave. Coyne's name and a few remaining words of his poem can still be seen today on the wall of the middle entrance just before the first storage room.

Part of poem written by Thomas Coyne on cave wall:
*Come tell me blue-eyed stranger, say wither dost though roam?
O'er this wide world a ranger, hast thou no friends or home?
They called me blue-eyed Mary when friends and fortune smiled.
But says blue-eyed Mary, now I am sorrow's child....*

Signature of "Coyne the Prophet" (right)



The cave was dug in two sections. The first section dug was a semicircle, with an entrance at each end. A third entrance and straight passage connecting to the semicircle was later added to provide more storage. Perhaps the cave was dug in this pattern to allow easy passage of the horses and wagons that were used to deliver the fruits and vegetables to the caves. The cave halls are lined with several smaller caves or cubicles, approximately 8-9 feet wide and 8-9 feet high. There are also two larger rooms that were used for the storage of apples and butter. Throughout the cave are several holes carved into the ceiling which lead to the surface above and were used for ventilation. One can also see several broken off wooden pegs in the ceiling of the cave. These pegs held lights powered by a generator that helped to light the cave.



Teams of horses were driven in one entrance with their loaded wagons and the produce was emptied into the suitable bin. Records show the following huge quantities of

vegetables were produced and stored in the cave during one year:

** 9,300 bushels of potatoes

** 400 bushels of carrots

** 417 bushels of rutabagas

** 17-18 tons of cabbage

These quantities are not surprising, considering that more than 1,000 acres were being farmed by the Rochester State Hospital and close to 2,000 people were being fed with food raised onsite.

Eventually, when the preferred method of food preservation became canning and electric refrigeration, use of the cave was phased out. In 1941, however, when the Hospital canned 21,169 gallons of vegetables, they still stored 20 barrels of dill pickles and 15 tons of sauerkraut in the cave. In the mid 1950s the cave was abandoned.

In 1990 the second and third entrances of the cave were closed to protect the natural beauty of the cave. Limestone walls seal off these two entrances, with small rectangular openings left to allow for the passage of animals that reside in the caves. These animals may include cave crickets, wintering bats, spiders, and phoebes, a summer resident bird. An iron door that can be opened for cave tours closes off the main entrance.



**Current Cave Entrance
(left)**



**Middle Cave Entrance
(right)**

CEMETERY

The land used for the cemetery was purchased in 1886. This was the second cemetery to be used by the Rochester State Hospital. The exact location of the first cemetery is unknown, but it was likely to the southeast of the monument, which can be seen near the middle of the cemetery. The people buried in the cemetery were patients at the State Hospital. The 2,019 gravesites are carefully platted and the location of each individual grave meticulously recorded. Originally the male patients were buried south and the female patients north of the road which went down the center of the cemetery. This segregation ended in 1940, when the first female was buried south of the road. The gravesites were then filled in sequence without regard to the sex of the deceased until the last burial in 1965. Most of the original gravestones were removed due to vandalism or for safety reasons.



Rochester State Hospital Cemetery

In 1975, a memorial was erected in the middle of the Rochester State Hospital Cemetery to pay respects to the more than 2,000 individuals who were buried in the Cemetery. An inscription on the granite and limestone memorial reads as follows:

“A Memorial to the 2019 immigrants and rural folk whose life expectations were disrupted by illness. A cemetery for Rochester State Hospital 1886-1965.”

A recent effort to revitalize the cemetery has resulted in new headstones being placed as well as new landscaping.



Rochester State Hospital Cemetery Memorial



Mortuary Cave

This is a small, single-room cave, located at the east end of the cemetery. This cave was also dug by patients from the Hospital out of St. Peter sandstone. The purpose of this cave was to store bodies during the winter months. Once the ground thawed in the springtime, the bodies were buried in the cemetery. This cave was gated up in 2006.

OLD QUARRY

Located within Quarry Hill Park in the far NW corner is a second, smaller quarry. Less is known about the work that took place in this quarry. It is possible that the limestone removed from the old quarry was used in the construction of several structures south of the old quarry.

Slaughter House

The slaughterhouse was built to provide meat for the Hospital, thus reducing the expense of feeding the large population of the Hospital. Records from 1890 show that the last contract for meat from the local butcher had been at the cost of six cents per pound!



Soap House

Because of the large quantity of fat available from the slaughterhouse, a soap house was built in 1890. This operation was so successful that all ten state hospitals were supplied with soap from the Rochester State Hospital's soap house. Today the foundation of the soap factory can still be seen, but with many large trees growing inside.

Kilns

Just south of the old quarry, near the soap house, are two kilns. The purpose of these kilns remains unknown.

Cistern

Remnants of an old cistern are located near the kilns. The cistern, also built around 1890, was used to collect and supply water for the farmhouse and slaughterhouse. There is a story told regarding a horse missing from the farm. Several weeks passed before they finally found the horse.....in the cistern! The spring still runs through the cistern, but all that remains of the structure is a portion of the lower wall.

OAK SAVANNA

In 1998 a twenty-acre hilltop site within Quarry Hill Park was restored to an oak savanna. This was made possible through funding from the Quarry Hill Friends and a matching grant by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The project consisted of the removal of non-native species, including buckthorn. Native forbes and grasses were then planted in the area among the many existing Burr and Red oak trees. Some of those planted include: Hairy Wood Mint, Early Sunflower, Brown-Eyed Susan, Butterfly Milkweed, and Purple Giant Hyssop. The savanna now serves as a habitat for a number of birds, mammals, and insects, as well as native grasses, wildflowers and trees. A rotating portion



of the oak savanna is burned each year to regenerate the land and control invasive plants.



PRAIRIE

In 1982 Quarry Hill established a prairie plot within the Park. This prairie is located northeast of the nature center. To prepare the site, trees were moved, vegetation was mowed and controlled burns were done. A variety of seeds and seedlings were then planted. The prairie has attracted butterflies, birds and other wildlife.