

CREVE COEUR PARK

PARK HISTORY

Creve Coeur Lake formed several thousand years ago when a meander loop of the Missouri River was cut off. The original lake varied in depth from 10 to 30 feet and covered over 400 acres. Until the mid-20th century a smaller lake was located to the west of the big lake. It was called the Upper or Little Creve Coeur Lake. It gradually disappeared due to siltation.

The name is French, literally meaning “broken heart” but used as a figure of speech to describe a great grief, sorrow, or affliction. Although obviously spurious tales of Indian maidens have been told in the 20th century about the origins of the name here, the truth is that the Anglo settlers in this area never learned why earlier French settlers had employed this expression. It might relate to a local event, but it could equally refer to one of at least five places in France, to a fort built in Illinois in 1680 by La Salle, or to one of several French family names. There is even an old French breed of chickens called Crevecoeur; they have green-black feathers and are supposed to have originated at Crèvecoeur-en-Auge.

Creve Coeur Lake became the site of a large resort and vacation area. The lake was approximately two and a half miles long and one mile wide during this period, which made it a big attraction. In 1881, the Missouri Pacific Railroad built a spur line to the lake from Laclede Station. The *Spectator* of June 18, 1886 announced the completion of a rival line by the St. Louis, Kansas City and Colorado (the Katy). Jacob Studt, a local farmer and general store owner, built the first of several hotels, dance pavilions, and boat houses on the Upper Lake. In 1889 he offered grounds and a subsidy for the annual county fair, which was held there for about thirty years.

The upper level of the park was once the site of a large amusement park known as “Electric Park.” In 1899, the United Railway Company, which later became Bi-State Development Agency, constructed a line from Delmar Gardens, at Delmar & Kingsland, to the park. The brick building centrally located in the park was originally a booster station for the city electricity that powered the streetcars. The brick building was also the location of the “loop,” where the streetcars turned around to return to the city. The maintenance building area is where the cars entered and exited the park; the original rail ties can still be seen in that area.

At the turn of the century, the county fair was held on ground west of the lake, and the racetrack used at that time remains as an impression in the ground there.

Eventually a “scenic railway” cable car was built from the brick building area to the lakefront. This railway operated on a gravity principle downhill, and was pulled to the top by a large cable. After the 1904 World’s Fair, a 255-foot observation tower was moved from Forest Park to Creve Coeur. This tower was placed north of the brick building overlooking the lake but has since been removed.

Around the 1920's the area began to decline in popularity as gangsters and hoodlums began to frequent the saloons, restaurants and nightclubs located at the lakefront. By the end of Prohibition, Creve Coeur was almost exclusively a gangster hideout.

Four hundred (400) acres of land was donated to St. Louis County on June 3, 1945, and Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park became the first County Park. Between 1950 and 1955, the lake almost dried up, and local conservation agents were attempting to save the fish. Rather than allow the fish to die, citizens were asked to come to the lake and take whatever fish they could find by any means they had available. During the following seasons, the Missouri River rose and backed up into the lake, not only refilling it, but also restocking the fish supply.

From funds allocated through the 1969 County Bond Issue, St. Louis County purchased all the land surrounding the lake, including the Creve Coeur Beach Subdivision, a development east of Marine Drive that went back to the 1920s. The Federal Government required that all of the buildings and property in the Creve Coeur Beach development be purchased prior to the receipt of any Federal money. Included were approximately 150 cottages, some of which were permanent residences requiring government relocation assistance.

Dredge Operation: From 1974 until 1981 Creve Coeur Lake was the site of a major dredging operation. Surface acreage increased from 220 acres to 320 acres and the average depth increased from 18 inches to 10 feet. In total, this project moved 4,646,400 cubic yards of lake slurry to the shores and opened the lake up to renewed use. In the course of the dredging, a

large unexpected quantity of sand was located. The project was then slightly modified to take advantage of this and the result is the 1600 feet of beach along Marine Avenue. Since its completion, this project has become well known to the dredging industry as the biggest and most successful local government dredging project in the country. EPA funded this project.

In 1984 the 2nd L&WCF grant was received for the development of the Sailboat Cove.

The lower park was entirely submerged by the Missouri River in the Great Flood of 1993. Several park facilities were destroyed or damaged, and since then all facilities in that location have been designed to withstand flooding. The use of the Federal Land & Water Conservation Fund grant in land acquisition and park development placed strong restrictions on future uses of the lands for purposes other than outdoor recreation. Should the lands be used for other than park purposes, some conditions of federal law would have to be addressed. In early 1990, MoDOT started active planning for the extension of Page Avenue. It was determined that 25.8 acres of right-of-way needed to be taken from Creve Coeur Park across the south end of the lake. Section 6(f) of the Land & Water Conservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act require that the environmental damage associated with this highway project be mitigated. As a result, 1,005.8 acres were added to Creve Coeur Park in 1999. Four miles of paved bicycle path were constructed in the park. MoDOT was required to dredge Creve Coeur Lake to help remedy a chronic siltation problem and to create a new lake (Mallard Lake) to help alleviate the recurrence of siltation. MoDOT was asked to contribute not less than six million dollars to implement the entire mitigation plan. 167 acres of the mitigation tract have been leased to Crystal Springs Quarry Golf Club for 30 years, until December 2029.

In recent years annual attendance at Creve Coeur has exceeded 1 million, making it the most heavily visited St. Louis County Park.

Creve Coeur Park is included in the Missouri River Greenway.

TREMAYNE SHELTER

Bertram W. Tremayne, Jr. was born in St. Louis in 1914. He earned his Bachelor's and law degrees from Washington University. He founded the Tremayne, Lay, Carr & Bauer law firm in Clayton in 1954, where he worked

until his retirement. His first wife, Frances L. Tremayne, died in 1964. They had two children, Pamela and Eric. He married Clara T. Tremayne in 1965, whom he was married to at the time of his death in 1996. During his lifetime he served as president of the Missouri Bar and the Missouri Bar Foundation. He was also a member of the board of governors of the Missouri Bar and served on the American Bar Association House of Delegates. He served as chairman of the advisory board of the St. Louis County Parks and Recreation Department, as well as president of the St. Louis Metropolitan YMCA. He was also actively involved in the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves and the Boy Scouts of America. The Tremayne Shelter at Creve Coeur County Park has been named in his honor.

HELDMANN SHELTER

George Heldmann was born on May 16, 1894. He began with the Parks Department as a Parks Foreman in 1946. He was a Parks Supervisor III when he retired in 1967. The Heldmann Shelter at Creve Coeur Park is named in his honor.