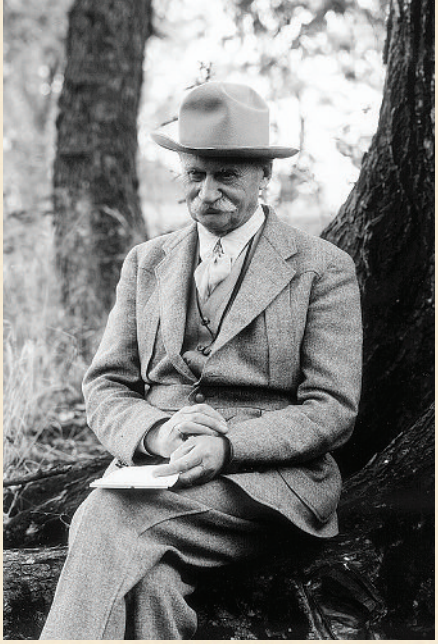
"The object of the park reservations is to preserve the scenic beauty of Illinois in its primitive form and to hold it as a heritage for generations yet unborn. There is an inherent quality of great force in primitive beauty that is invaluable to mankind."

—Jens Jensen, 1926



(Courtesy Lincoln Memorial Gardens, Springfield.)

Instead of our usual mo
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In the early 1900s, Jens Jensen (above) and others founded The Prairie Club, an organization leading excursions to some of Illinois' most scenic sites, including Starved Rock, which became a state park in 1911.

Story By Cory Pelc

The recent growth in environmental awareness across the globe is not a new idea.

Creation of a national park system took root in the mid-1800s, but with one significant difference from the Old World's park system. Throughout Europe, nature parks were reserved for private hunting and resorting activities, activities of the elite. In North America, private landowners were opening their scenic properties for public use. The concept of a New World park system, providing public land for use by everyone, was evolving but proponents struggled with gaining legislative support.

By 1872, the movement was well under way, and gained further support with President Ulysses S. Grant's creation of our nation's first park, Yellowstone National Park.

nthly feature story on one of Illinois' 131 state park or recreation
ovide a partial history of how our park system was created.

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te Parks

Interest Builds in Illinois

Around the turn of the 20th century, the concept of dedicated parklands was gaining momentum in Illinois. Jens Jensen (1860-1951), a landscape architect who designed many Chicago-area parks, was one of the leaders in the creation of state park and forest reserve systems in Illinois.

In 1903, Jensen and fellow architect Dwight Perkins began to develop a plan to provide for natural preserves (not to be confused with the present-day designated nature preserves) throughout northeast Illinois. A product of this collaboration were "Saturday Afternoon Walking Trips," outings that attracted crowds of 200 or more people. Because of the rapid growth and interest in these events, a separate organization, "The Prairie Club," was formed to manage the excursions.

One popular early destination for the Prairie Club was Starved Rock along the Illinois River, featured a stand of rare, native white pines. Many local citizens considered Starved Rock worthy of state preservation. The Rock River area around Oregon was another site favored by club members.

The Prairie Club pushed the legislature for a forest preserve bill, allowing Starved Rock and other areas across the state to be saved. As a result, Starved Rock was acquired by the state in 1911. From 1911 to 1925, at least 24 bills were introduced in the General Assembly for purchase of 13 specific sites. None of the four proposed scenic sites but four of the nine proposed historical sites were passed in the 14-year span.

Determined to make an influence, in April 1913 Jensen invited a group of influential men and women from the Chicago area and downstate Illinois to meet and discuss a conservation policy that would protect tracts of Illinois with historic and scenic value. This group formed a new organization, "Friends of Our Native Landscape," and in 1921 published a report describing scenic sites worthy of preservation for their natural landscapes.

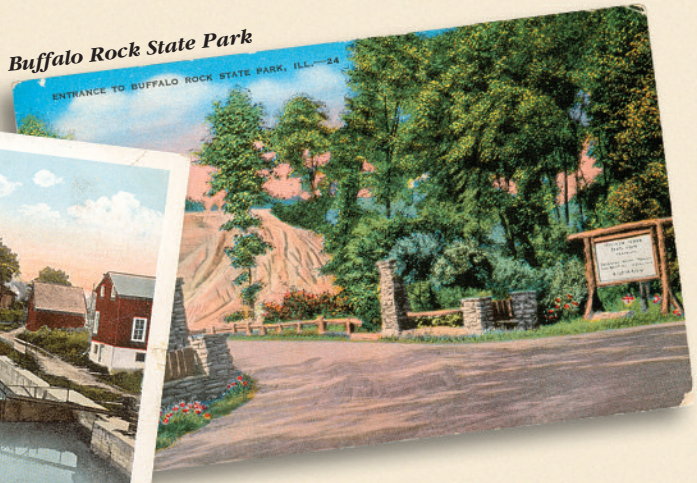
Extensive lotus beds drew visitors to Grass Lake (Chain O'Lakes State Park, left).

Historic (Fort Kaskaskia, above) and scenic (Cave-in-Rock) sites dominated Illinois' park system until the 1930s when recreation became a focus.

Starved Rock State Park

Hennepin Canal State Trail

Buffalo Rock State Park



The concept of the New World park system was to provide public land for the use of everyone.

Progression of Purposes

Preserving History

Until 1927, historical sites were the focus of all parks acquired by the state. Illinois' first state-owned park, Fort Massac, celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. Starved Rock State Park was acquired in 1911 to preserve its rich Native American and French history. Fort Chartres, Lincoln's New Salem, Fort Creve Coeur and Cahokia Mounds were added by 1925.

Scenic Movement

Although legislation allowed for the acquisition of scenic sites, not until 1925 did the idea of scenic parks gain general acceptance. A letter from C.R. Miller, Director for the Division of Parks and Memorials, to a person who suggested the acquisition of a historical site, shows that the park idea had started to catch on with officials as well: "While I fully appreciate that we should select historical parks...it seems to me we should try and provide a few playgrounds for the people of the State."

The 1925 General Assembly clearly stated that scenic land was to be considered for incorporation into the park system. Within a few years, Giant City, Cave-in-Rock and Mississippi Palisades were designated as Illinois state parks.

Recreation

A 1931 amendment to the forest preserve act called for recognition and authorization of three kinds of parks—scenic, historical and recreational. The importance of conserving the original character of the landscape was stressed, and criteria established for designating public-use lands. A continued emphasize on historic sites was featured; however, stipulations for lands with signifi-

White Pines Forest State Park

In the 1930s, development of new parks stemmed from the need to provide easily accessible outdoor recreation throughout the state.

cant geologic formations, areas 1,000 acres or larger and forested areas were added. Recognition of recreational parks most likely stemmed from the realization that while the people of Illinois desired some type of easily accessible outdoor recreation, many parts of the state lacked lands meeting the standards of the scenic park designation.

The first eight recreational parks were acquired between 1934 and 1939. Among these was 1,290 acres of mined land purchased from United Electric Coal Co. that formed Kickapoo State Recreation Area in 1939. Contributions from Danville area residents greatly aided in purchase of the property.

The period from 1932-1942 is commonly called the era of Civilian Conservation Corps construction, with a distinct construction style that is readily evident in the lodges, picnic shelters and bridges at many parks, such as Giant City, Starved Rock, White Pines and Pere Marquette state parks.

Construction of recreational lakes had been recommended as early as 1938 in the "Illinois Park, Parkway and Recreational Area Plan." By the early 1940s, these ideas became part of a program to address growing interest in sport fisheries, swimming and boating, and to achieve conservation goals such as water storage and flood control. From 1953 through the 1960s, at least 30 artificial state park lakes had been constructed and several older scenic parks were rehabilitated to serve increasing recreational, camping and lodging needs.

In 1985, the Historic Preservation Agency separated from the Department of Conservation (which evolved into the Department of Natural Resources in 1995), with each agency directed to focus management efforts on specific types of facilities. Today, HPA maintains and develops the majority of state-owned historic sites.

Now, DNR focuses on scenic and recreational facilities—along with three historic sites, the Illinois and Michigan Canal, Hennepin Canal and Illinois' oldest park facility, Fort Massac.

Next month's park feature will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Fort Massac State Park.

Cory Pelc served as an intern with DNR and is a senior communication major at the University of Illinois at Springfield.
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Now 100 years old, Illinois' state park system contains sites of scenic, historical and recreational value (Pere Marquette State Park, left; Starved Rock State Park, below).

Date of initial acquisition of state parks

1908	Fort Massac	historic
1911	Starved Rock	historic/scenic
1915	Fort Chartres*	historic
1919	Lincoln's New Salem	historic
1920	Fort Creve Couer *	historic
1925	Cahokia Mounds*	historic
1927	Black Hawk	historic
	Giant City	scenic
1929	Fort Kaskaskia*	historic
	Lincoln Log Cabin*	historic
	Cave-in-Rock	scenic
	Buffalo Rock	recreation
	Mississippi Palisades	scenic
1932	Apple River Canyon	scenic
	Pere Marquette	scenic
1934	Gebhard Woods	
	Illini	recreation
1936	Lincoln Trail	
1937	Spitler Woods	recreation
1938	Fox Ridge	recreation
	Lincoln Trail Homestead	historic
	Kankakee River	recreation
1939	Kickapoo	recreation
	Moraine Hills	
1942	Siloam Springs	
1943	Red Hills	recreation
	Illinois Beach	scenic
	Matthiessen	scenic
1945	Lowden	recreation
1946	Dixon Springs	scenic
	Frank Holten (Grand Marais)	
1948	Nauvoo	
	Prophetstown	
1949	Ferne Clyffe	scenic

*Now a State Historic Site.

Early artificial lake projects

Original acquisition

1947	Beaver Dam
	Ramsey Lake
	Johnson Sauk Trail
1948	Argyle Lake
	Lake Murphysboro
	Weldon Springs
1949	Lake Le-Aqua-Na