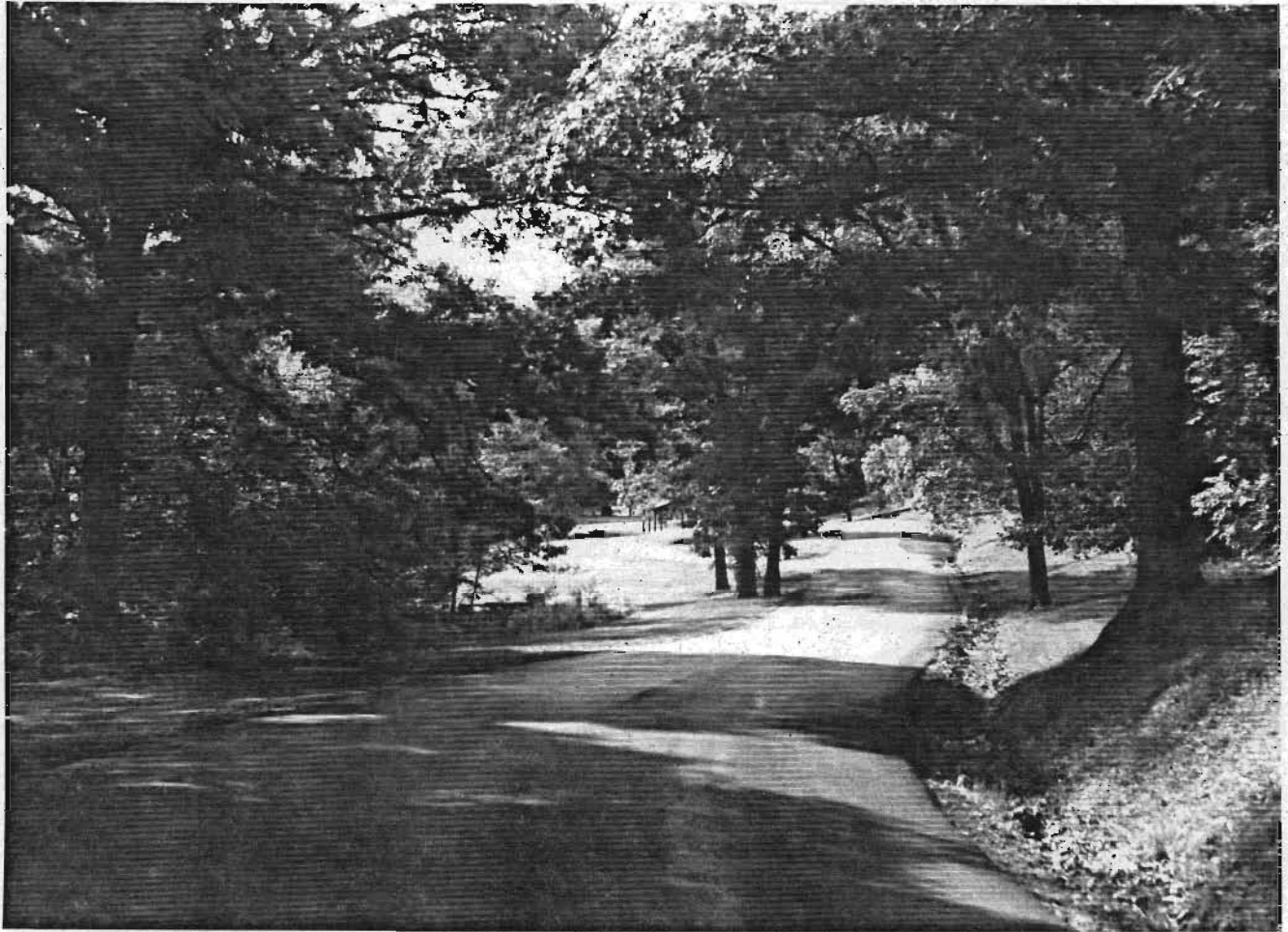


EXCELSIOR SPRINGS PARK & DRIVEWAY SYSTEM
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIC SURVEY



EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MISSOURI

THREE GABLES PRESERVATION

February 15, 1994

**Prepared by Deon K. Wolfenbarger
Three Gables Preservation**

**for the Excelsior Springs Historic Preservation Commission,
and the City of Excelsior Springs, Missouri**

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INTRODUCTION

The survey of landscape architectural and historic resources in Excelsior Springs's park system was begun in October, 1993. The survey was funded by the City of Excelsior Springs with a matching grant through the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Program, which receives allocations from the Historic Preservation Fund of the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and subsequent amendments.

The survey was conducted by Deon K. Wolfenbarger, project manager and principal of Three Gables Preservation. Additional research was conducted by Sonya Morgan of Excelsior Springs. The survey project coordinator for Excelsior Springs was Molly McGovern. Project Coordinator for the Missouri Historic Preservation Program was Beverly Fleming.

The City of Excelsior Springs prepared a survey plan in 1990. This survey plan identified areas and/or resources which were worthy of further investigation. Completed with the survey plan were 20 inventory forms, which focused on the hotels of Excelsior Springs. Phase I of the survey inventoried the historic buildings in the downtown district -- the Hall of Waters district, and the area around the Elms Hotel -- the Central Park district. Phase II of the survey included the inventory of the historic park resources, as well as the buildings in the Boarding House district. All surveys prior to this date had been concerned with buildings. In Phase II, landscape features were proposed for inventory. Specifically, the park and connecting driveway system of Excelsior Springs would be reviewed for its historic significance in the context of Excelsior Springs's development. The parks and drives which were part of the connected system in the city were thus evaluated for their contribution to the system as well as for their individual significance.

It is hoped that the survey of the parks system will not only reveal the significance of these valuable historic resources, but also that the documentation will then be utilized in future planning efforts. Identification is always the first step in any planning process. Future design decisions, protection measures, or promotional activities can all benefit from the information gathered in a historic survey.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The City of Excelsior Springs conducted an intensive level survey of the following parks: Sunnyside Park, Fishing River Linear Park, East Valley Park (and Isley Woods), Siloam Mountain Park, Regent Park, and the Excelsior Springs Golf Course. The following drives were reviewed: Elms Boulevard, Regent Boulevard, Dunbar Avenue, St. Louis Avenue, Kimball Avenue, Wildwood, East Valley Drive, and Golf Hill Drive. These resources have been identified in a map prepared by George E. Kessler ca. 1910 (Parks Survey Map #1), and in a map prepared by Hare & Hare in 1926, which listed the city's park holdings at the time (Parks Survey Map #2). The above listed parks appeared on both maps. The drives were more difficult to narrow down to a list, as it appears that they were never officially under the jurisdiction of the parks department or board. However, the drives listed above were the ones most frequently mentioned in literature describing the park system.

Methodology

Field Survey: On-site field observations were recorded for the above named parks and drives. Available base maps were used to document various features, including buildings, structures, objects, circulation systems, drainage & engineering structures, site furnishings, and natural features. A discussion of their condition, and type of construction materials was included in a survey form. Photographs recorded the current conditions of the parks, parkways, boulevards, and significant individual features.

Background Research: Archival research began with the identification of primary and secondary data sources. The Parks Department (located on Thompson Avenue) did not have any historical information on hand, although the City offices at the Hall of Waters building had a few documents. Fortunately, this information had been recently catalogued. Dates of acquisition, construction, and other pertinent historic information was one of the prime goals of this research. Newspaper articles were a main source of information, as were the files at the Excelsior Springs Historical Museum. A great deal of correspondence between George Kessler and citizens of Excelsior Springs was available from the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. The offices of Oschner, Hare & Hare of Kansas City also had some information on Excelsior Springs, although this data is not presently catalogued.

Evaluation: The data was then synthesized and recorded on the ASLA National Survey Form. Field work and archival research was integrated and organized as it was compiled. Maps and photographs of the properties over

time were be reviewed for similarities, changes, and their correlation with the accumulated data. Historic data was reviewed for its completeness, and any gaps in information were noted. A discussion of significance and integrity, utilizing the National Register criteria and NPS Bulletin 18 as a basis for analysis, resulted from these comparisons. The most difficult aspect of analyzing parks was the combination of the lack of available data with the inherent nature of landscapes to change over time. The summary report which follows will address this issue of change while addressing the potential of National Register designation. In addition, an overall history of the development of the system is included, serving as a preliminary outline of a relevant historic landscape context.

Products

1. The National Survey Form developed by ASLA for historic landscapes was completed to the National Register level of documentation for each park. One survey form was used for all of the drives, however. A continuation sheet for each identified major feature was also included. It is important to note, however, that the individual features were not emphasized over the overall design. As N.R. Bulletin 18 states, "Individual features - even though some may be movable or could be considered separately - contribute to the overall identity and character of the landscape and should be considered, in most instances not individually but in terms of their relationship to the totality of the landscape." 5x7" black & white photographs accompany each survey form and continuation sheet, as do pertinent historic and existing condition maps. As the parks department does not have any base maps for their parks, the existing condition maps were developed from any available city-wide base maps. The existing condition maps located the major features for each park or boulevard.

2. A summary report briefly outlined the early history of the Excelsior Springs parks system. An overall discussion established the resources' significance, including whether they are significant for their original design, altered character, or both. The report also made recommendations as to the feasibility of pursuing National Register designation.

SUMMARY REPORT

As noted in the research design, inventory forms were completed for each of the designated parks and the drive system. These present a brief history, description, and discussion of the significance of the individual site. However, as is often the case with most park systems, a broader perspective is necessary in order to evaluate the system as a whole. In the early part of the twentieth century, most cities which were involved with planning for a city-wide park system were much larger than Excelsior Springs. The parks were usually developed with the thought of benefiting the local citizenry. Excelsior Springs, however, was not a typical community. The development of the parks were integral with the promotion of the mineral water system, and were seen as amenities which were necessary for the transient residents of community. The history of Excelsior Springs park system is thus a reflection of the city's unique history and development.

History of the Excelsior Springs Parks System

Prior to its "discovery" in 1880, the natural resources around Excelsior Springs was familiar to Native Americans and early white settlers. However, the rough terrain, rocky hills, and heavy growth made it a difficult site for settlement. The resources for which the town would eventually become famous -- the mineral waters -- were known before 1880, but were at first treated with suspicion. After all, the overflow of one of the eventually famous springs was colored an iron-rust red.

In 1880, a nearby farmer whose daughter was afflicted with scrofula turned to the waters in desperation for treatment. When a rapid recovery occurred, and other ailments were "tested" and "cured", the word quickly spread of the healing qualities of the water. The owner of the spring, A.W. Wyman, realized the potential for developing his land. Along with Reverend Flack, he had the land platted, the water analyzed by St. Louis chemists, and started promoting its curative qualities. Dr. Flack turned his preaching abilities to the merits of the waters, which he carried to a number of midwestern states.

Within a year, two hundred houses were built on the hillsides and valleys surrounding the original spring, while hundreds of other visitors had to camp in tents or covered wagons. In 1881, Excelsior Springs became first a village (in February), and later a city of the fourth class (in July).

As the "Excelsior" (later Siloam) spring became famous, people started noticing the numerous other springs in the area. The promotion and development around these other springs quickly followed, with the most prominent being the "Empire" (later the Regent), Relief, Superior, and Saratoga springs. The springs were popular gathering places for the locals and visitors alike. Twenty separate springs or wells were eventually discovered, releasing four distinct varieties of water. Although the valley developed rapidly, most of the development was confined to the areas which had previously been farmed, thus leaving the banks of the river and the wooded hillside in their natural state.

The medicinal value of the waters became the calling card for Excelsior Springs, which soon developed a national reputation as a "health resort." Interestingly, the combination of these two words gives us an insight as to the principal attributes of the community -- the mineral waters, which were combined with natural beauty. Although the mineral waters were clearly the reason for the development of the town, the aesthetics of the natural setting was always promoted, from the earliest brochures of the 1880's up through the twentieth century.

[From 1900] Here the air is pure and bracing, there is no malaria, there are no mosquitos, and cool, health-giving, life-saving springs are seen; here peace and quietness is found, health restored, the invalid becomes well again, and those who seek a quiet place to rest and build up, rejoice in finding such a beautiful resort.

[From 1927] "Powerful" as the waters are, it is the opportunities offered the visitor to get close to nature without undergoing hardships that really quicken and tone the sluggish muscle and add grace and youthful snap to the movement of aging bodies.

No where else, it was believed, could Mother Nature have provided this provident combination of health-giving waters in such a rugged, attractive setting. It was evident that not only local boosters thought highly of Excelsior Springs, for the city soon had a far greater visiting population than its permanent population. The citizens of Excelsior Springs soon realized that they needed to begin planning the development of their community. Luckily, some of the finest planners in the country were close at hand.

George E. Kessler George Edward Kessler was born in Frankenhause, Germany in 1862, but moved to New York with his family when he was two years old. His mother is credited for his choice of careers, deciding that the new field of landscape architecture would combine Kessler's creative talents with the practicality of engineering. He was educated in Europe in botany, forestry, landscape design, engineering, and civic design. At the age of twenty

he returned to this country. At this point, he had some contact with Frederick Law Olmsted concerning projects in other cities.

Kessler came to the Kansas City area in the mid-1880's to work as the Superintendent of Parks for the Kansas City, Fort Scott, and Gulf Railroad. His first project was to create an amusement park in Merriam, Kansas. He soon opened his own office, and began work on projects such as Hyde Park and Janssen Place in Kansas City. One of his early projects was the landscaping for the home of August Meyer, who eventually was on the Kansas City park board which hired Kessler. In 1892, Kessler was employed as the "secretary" of the Park Board, for which he received a salary, as well as its engineer, for which he received no pay. He subsequently published a report in 1893 which laid the groundwork for the system of parks and boulevards of Kansas City. Not only was this report extremely significant to the development of Kansas City, but it served to spread Kessler's reputation.

For Kansas City, Kessler not only developed the master plan for the entire system and site plans for individual parks and boulevards, he was involved in public presentations, the development of condemnation ordinances, and construction supervision. He also maintained his private practice during this period. A list recently prepared for an "Exhibition Outline" shows the known works of Kessler. In the chronological listing, he shows a park and boulevard planning study for Excelsior Springs in 1890. However, Kessler does not appear to have had any involvement with Excelsior Springs until 1906. The first tentative presentation of a park system does not occur until 1910, and he was not officially involved with the City until 1914. At any rate, in 1890 the City of Excelsior Springs was only ten years old and was in no position to be developing a city wide park system.

George Kessler began consulting with private developers in Excelsior Springs in 1906, when I.J. Ringolksy paid him for sketches of a subdivision on the Elms site. In 1907, he prepared a report for J.G. Brownson (Agent) regarding seven acres north of the Fishing River, and their suitability for an amusement resort. In this report, he appears to be agreeing with Brownson on the suitability of land south of the river for residential property. However, either in hopes of securing additional work, or just due to the "park planner" that he was, he felt it necessary to go on:

. . . permit me, however, to recommend that you specialize on these lines and endeavor to secure the cooperation on the part of other owners of similar lands lying along and adjacent to the river, and to feature the river itself. By that, I mean to establish a street, even if not a very important one, on each side of the river, leaving a slight area, even if only a few feet, at times broadening out at other places where the meanderings of the stream will permit or require, between such

streets and the river bank, thereby making it possible to preserve the river from becoming the back alley for properties backing upon it and consequently becoming a repository for old tin cans and other rubbish of the town.

. . . Aside from the particular property interested, which would be beneficially affected by this manner of improvement along the Fishing River, you will have created (if you can secure the cooperation of other property owners from your lands along the entire river front, passing all the springs and as far as the Regent Spring) an improvement of the greatest possible value to the entire town of Excelsior Springs. If you can accomplish such a result and make a park of the river and the lands lying between two such roadways, you will create a pleasant and attractive driveway and promenade that will be immensely appreciated by the transient population of the town, and, I think will do much toward attracting a wealthier and consequently a more liberal class than is now encouraged to visit the Springs, and very greatly enhance property holdings in and near the town. (Missouri Historical Society, 1907-1915)

The W.F. Shelton Land Agency made a request of Kessler to visit the city in order to look over some property (possibly in 1909). However, it was with the Bell family that Kessler had his closest involvement. The Kessler Files at the Missouri Historical Society do not indicate exactly when the Bell family first became involved with Kessler. By 1910, however, they were corresponding with great regularity, and apparently had been doing so for a while.

In 1902, Dr. William A. Bell became interested in Excelsior Springs, and eventually invested over \$300,000 in the community. Bell was the former vice-president of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad and president of the Durango Land & Coal Company. His son, Major William A.J. Bell, began corresponding with around 1907, looking for suggestions on how to develop the family's growing real estate holdings. This led to the formation of the General Realty & Mineral Water Company in 1910, whose prime purpose was to develop the property on Golf Hill. Bell was named president, Kessler vice-president, John E. Lundstrom secretary/treasurer, Charles W. Fish general manager, and a board of directors consisting of these gentlemen plus Howard F. Lea.

Major Bell and his father had visited Memphis, Tennessee in 1910 with Kessler, prompting Bell to write Kessler "What a beautiful city you have made and what valuable things you have saved!" Perhaps because of the Bells' interest in the park system which Kessler had designed for that city, Kessler included preliminary recommendations for a city-wide system in a map he prepared for the Bells in 1910. This map was prepared for a prospectus of the General

Realty & Mineral Water Company which was sent out that year. Bell also requested that Kessler write something in the prospectus. In the map, he shows the rudimentary plans for a system of parks and drives, which were coincidentally all connected to proposed residential development held by the General Realty Company.

Kessler continued to work with Bell's company, primarily through correspondence with Charles Fish. In 1911, an associate in Kessler's firm prepared plans for developing Siloam Springs, although this was not under the control of either the General Realty Company or the Bells.

The City of Excelsior Springs learned of Kessler's involvement with the Bells, and approached him with the thought that he could continue his earlier plans for a city-wide park system. In 1913, the Commercial Club wrote Kessler and asked for the cost of preparing plans for the entire tract of land that the city had recently acquired, as well as for more specific plans for the improvement of Siloam Spring. After his years of association with the Bells and Charles Fish, Kessler did not feel he had to "go after" the Excelsior Springs work, and was at first inclined to refuse. When officially contacted by the City in 1914, however, he decided to accept a contract for \$1000 to prepare plans for "the park in the river valley . . . and offer suggestions in the form of sketches and a perspective drawing . . . of the buildings suggested for the spring house". (Missouri Historical Society, 1907-1915)

In 1993, the City of Excelsior Springs reviewed and catalogued numerous documents which had been stored at the city. None of George Kessler's plans for the Excelsior Springs parks system were discovered at the city, leaving little hope of finding these plans. The Kessler files at the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, while containing a wealth of information in the correspondence files, also did not reveal the critical information of site details which could be found in plans. The only "plan" discovered associated with Kessler the glossy, color printed map from the General Realty & Mineral Water Company, which contained "Proposed holdings and an indication of proposed main lines of development under the auspices of Mr. Geo. E. Kessler." (See "Parks Survey Map #1) Overlaid on the City of Excelsior Springs were area color coded according to the following categories: Properties under contract; Estate of W.A. Bell; Additional Properties; Parks, etc., present and proposed; Driveways, present and proposed.

The golf course is a prominent feature on this map. In turn, it is surrounded by a large tract of land "under contract". The map, which was really only meant to illustrate the prospectus of the company, does not have the parks system as its main focus. Rather, it is the land either under contract, or under consideration for development by the General Realty Company. Thus much of it focuses on

residential tracts. Very few of these ended up looking like Kessler's vision here. However, a fair amount of what he proposed for consideration as parks and drives did eventually become just that. The golf course served as the southeast terminus of the system. Kessler shows two curving drives leading northwest towards the downtown; only one was constructed. The downtown is shown as having a park south of Broadway, encompassing the Siloam and Sulpho-Saline Spring at its northern apex. The Fishing River runs east/west through this "downtown" park, and has a drive on both sides of the river. The mountain just south of this park is also highlighted on this map.

An elaborate drive system (never constructed) connects Regent Spring and the Elms Hotel to proposed development at the southwest corner of the city. This drive system then continues north along the ridge overlooking the river valley, connecting with other land, either under contract or under consideration, by the General Realty Company. Included in this is the Sunnyside Park tract, Dunbar Avenue, and the roads which today comprise the "horseshoe" curve.

As noted earlier, the primary purpose of this map was to interest potential investors in the holdings of the General Realty & Mineral Water Company, not to provide site specific details. Even proposed roads within residential development cannot be considered very seriously as having been "planned" at this stage. However, the map is significant as the first documentation of a city-wide view of a park system. Up to this point, any "park" development had been undertaken by private companies. Ironically, this first city-wide view was also financed by a private company.

The Kessler files in St. Louis do contain reports and correspondence, which often go into a great deal of detail regarding Kessler's thoughts on the park system. Although the report and plans he later prepared for the City focused on the Siloam Spring area, many of the ideas he laid out in the 1910 map are still evident.

Kessler and his assistant, Mr. Broadwell, visited the city in February of 1915, in order to consult with the park board regarding plans for a new pagoda over Siloam, and park work in general. Kessler was given approval to move ahead with plans around Siloam, but to leave the Etnson pavilion where it was. Kessler's plans were approved by City Council in April of 1915. Some of his recommendations were immediately undertaken; a 1915 publication by the Excelsior Springs Commercial Club indicated that the city had already moved ahead with Kessler's plans.

The attractive environment has been from the start protected by the residents. As an instance, they acquired a tract of land for park purposes extending over a mile through the town along both banks of the stream. This was placed in the hands of George E. Kessler, the

well-known landscape architect, for development and the construction of the spring pavilions and Siloam Gardens. \$100,000 has already been expended on this civic beauty plan in addition to the sums already spent by the city for concrete arch bridges and paved drives which form a part of the extensive park and driveway system. (Excelsior Springs: Missouri's National Resort, 1915)

In May of 1915, work was nearly completed on the widening of the channel of the Fishing River through Siloam Park. John Samuel, president of the park board, noted that in two to three years the park would be filled in enough to allow Kessler's plan to be fully developed. The low places of the old creek bed were filled up nearly eight feet. As can be expected in Excelsior Springs, though, nature did not cooperate with these plans. At the end of May, a flood caused the stream to pursue its old channel.

Siloam Spring As was previously noted, many of the parks were developed around the mineral water springs. Eventually, the park system would include Siloam Spring in the Siloam Gardens; Regent Spring in Regent Park; Superior Spring at the southeast edge of Siloam Gardens; Sunnyside well in Sunnyside Park; and the City Soda Wells in Siloam Park. The impetus for the City of Excelsior Springs to move ahead with an actual system of parks lay, however, with one site -- the area around Siloam Spring. Indeed, this site was the reason for the city's existence. However, by the 1920's private ownership and years of visitors had taken its toll on the existing pavilion. The platform was not only unsafe, but there was a potential "damage" suit pending as well. The citizens of Excelsior Springs realized that they all had a vested interest in the development of this and other key sites in the city. A resolution adopted by the American Legion of Excelsior Springs on November 11, 1922 outlines not only the importance of Siloam to the city, but gives some insight into the history preceding the important bond issue of 1922.

Whereas Siloam Spring, the spring that has made this city famous is now and has been for some time past, been in a very uninviting and dangerous condition, far from representing the advertised progressiveness of Missouri's national health resort, and

Whereas, only a small percentage of our visitors go to Siloam Spring under existing conditions, and,

Whereas, plans for improving and beautifying Siloam Gardens have been made by the most noted landscape artist and architect in the country, and nationally advertised as being in the process of completion, and

Whereas, plans for improving Siloam Spring were delayed for many years by reason of conflicting opinion as to the form to be adopted, and

Whereas, complete plans were in 1918 unanimously endorsed by the Mayor and Council, the park Board, the Commercial club and by the people, and one unit of the adopted plan has been completed.

Therefore, be it resolved by the American Legion that we endorse without qualification the bond issue of \$15,000 for the construction of the north half of Siloam Gardens in accordance with the well known (George E.) Kessler-(Henry F.) Hoit plan.

The newspapers and other civic organizations came out strongly for the 1922 bond issue. As is typically the case with issues such as these, there were undoubtedly some detractors, although the paper warned its readers against being "alarmed by the warbling of scarecrows". Usually such detractors were against the tax burden or proposed cost of an entire park system. However, it appears that there must have been some controversy over the proposed changes to the landscape in Siloam Gardens (most were in agreement that the pavilion was dilapidated). The newspaper noted that 80% of the grass and planting space would "be left unmarred under the Kessler plans, notwithstanding claims to the contrary." More specifically, there were comments regarding the removal of five trees, which the paper considered half-dead. It confronted these arguments with its own fourteen reasons to vote for "Old Siloam". One was the paper's claim that the plans have been designed "by the most distinguished architect in the world." When the bond election was passed overwhelmingly in November of 1922, it was viewed as a progressive movement -- that the city was "Going ahead!". With the city's reputation as a health resort, it could not afford to be viewed as anything but "up-to-date."

The city's annual report for the year ending on March 23, 1923 contained much information on the developing park system. Indeed, the parks report is the longest of all the service departments reports. There were photographs of Siloam Gardens under construction. It was noted that the cost of the property acquired to date was \$96,400, and the Siloam project, when completed, would cost \$75,000. When the Marietta Street bridge was completed, there would be a circuit of 8 miles of driveway system.

We have no apologies to make for our park system, as we are far ahead of cities of like size in park development and it is doubtful if one can find another city in the United States, irrespective of size, that can boast of having a system of parks that cost \$40.00 per capita." (Semi-Annual Report . . . March 23, 1923, [1923])

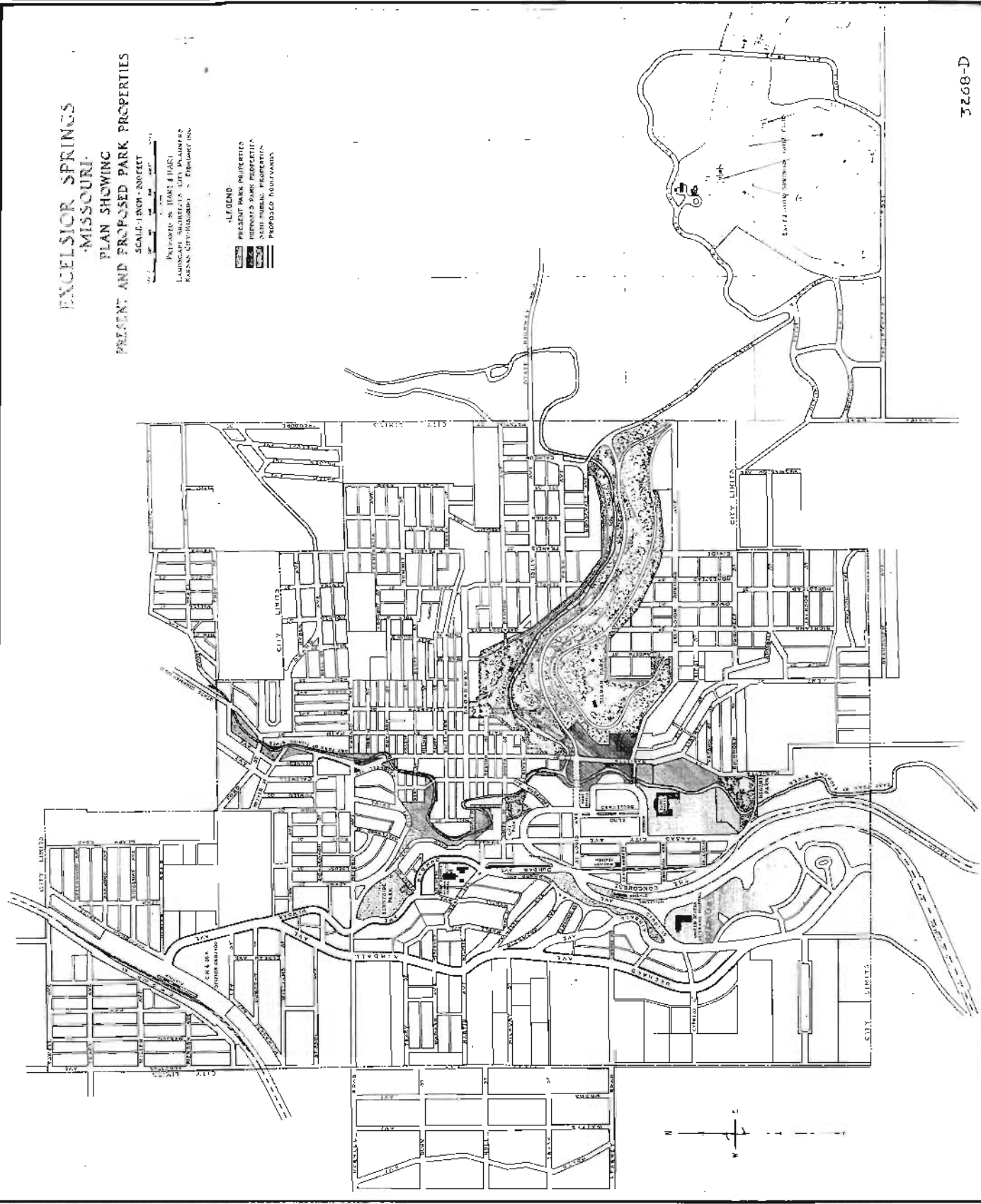
It is truly amazing that a city with the population of Excelsior Springs, which was in 1923 approximately 5000, took on the development of a park system of such size, extent, and expense. The area of the city was 907 acres in 1923, while the area of parks was 100 acres -- fully one-ninth of the city.

EXCELSIOR SPRINGS
MISSOURI
PLAN SHOWING
PRESENT AND PROPOSED PARK PROPERTIES

SCALE - 1 INCH = 200 FEET

PREPARED BY JOHN J. HARR
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS CITY PLANNERS
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

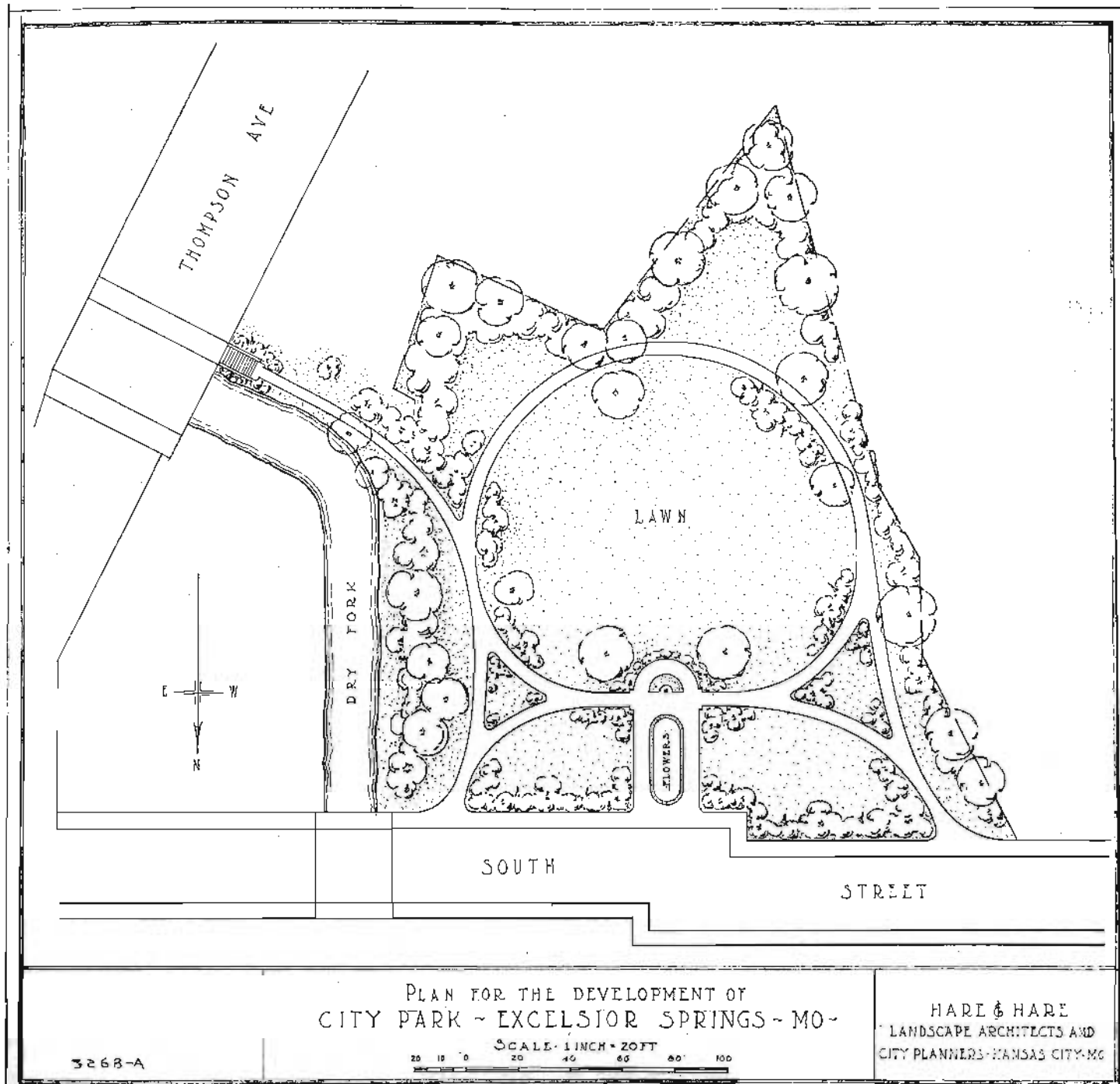
- LEGEND:
- PRESENT PARK PROPERTIES
 - PROPOSED PARK PROPERTIES
 - EXISTING PUBLIC PROPERTIES
 - PROPOSED RECREATION



3292-D

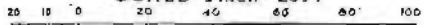
Figure 2

Figure 3



PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
CITY PARK - EXCELSIOR SPRINGS - MO -

SCALE - 1 INCH = 20 FT



3268-A

HARE & HARE
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND
CITY PLANNERS - KANSAS CITY, MO

As proof of the pudding, compare the Items against statistics of other cities of like size or of greater population and you will become aware of the fact that *Excelsior Springs* is one of the most metropolitan cities for its size in the United States. (Semi-Annual Report . . . March 23, 1923, [1923])

Hare & Hare Most of the focus in Excelsior Springs to this point had been around the Siloam Spring. It does not appear that Kessler ever made any specific recommendations regarding parks other than Siloam Gardens; any mention of other parks or drives was general in nature. Therefore, once the City was finally able to "complete" the Siloam Park, it realized that it needed to move beyond the focus on the downtown park. In 1924, Edna Sutermeister of the landscape architectural firm of Hare & Hare (and more importantly, at least as far as the City was concerned, formerly associated with George Kessler), was brought to town to develop a general beautification plan for the city.

The firm of Hare & Hare is one of the earliest practices in the United States to focus on urban or city planning. Founded by Sid J. Hare, who was joined in partnership in 1910 by his son, S. Herbert Hare, it became nationally recognized in the field of city planning. Herbert Hare was the designer for the firm, and was a widely respected leader of the profession, especially in the midwest, for half a century until his passing in 1960. He was a trustee of the ASLA (American Society of Landscape Architects) for years, and served as its president from 1941 to 1945. Located in Kansas City, the site of much of George Kessler's work, they eventually took over several of Kessler's projects upon his death.

After Sutermeister came to Excelsior Springs in 1924, Hare & Hare then prepared "Plan Showing Present and Proposed Park Properties" in 1926. Coded on this plan were: Present Park Properties; Proposed Park Properties; Semi-public Properties; and Proposed Boulevards (see Figure 2). Present (i.e., 1926) park properties included Regent Park, west of the intersection of Richmond and Marietta Streets and the high school. Larger than it is today, the park not only extended down to the banks of the Fishing River, but actually went west to Kansas City Avenue. A very large, curving, linear park is shown just south of downtown. Today, this area encompasses the Fishing River Linear Park, Siloam Mountain Park, East Valley Park, and Isley Woods. On the 1926 map, the entire area is labeled "Siloam Park". Sunnyside Park is also shown as a "present park" as is a "City Park" south of the intersection of South and Jefferson Streets (Figure 3). No records indicate that this was ever park land, in spite of being shown on the maps as wooded with curvi-linear walkways. Records do indicate that this city-owned property has always served as the

"hitch lot". Other city owned "park" land shown by Hare & Hare is the land in between the streets on the "horseshoe" curve.

A park was proposed for the area north of Regent park and south of Marietta Street. At Regent Avenue, this park area expanded to both sides of Marietta until it reached St. Louis Avenue. Additional park land was proposed to follow the Dry Fork of the Fishing River, from just north of South Street to the 1926 north city limits. It is interesting to note that all "boulevards" were shown on this map as "proposed", in spite of this fact that they were, by this point, not only graded and constructed, but paved as well. This may be an indication that the drives were not under the jurisdiction of the parks department at the time, as remains the case today. Perhaps the landscape architects were recommending a more complete boulevard treatment of these streets. Records do indicate that the city and private groups did embark on a fairly aggressive beautification program following the recommendations of Hare & Hare. The Daily Standard in 1927 noted that civic groups had already made much progress in carrying out the beautification plans of Hare & Hare. Two other publications of 1927 noted that the city boasted of a 180 acre park system at this point. This included Siloam and Regent springs, hiking paths, horseback trails, and the only 36-hole golf course between Chicago and the Rocky Mountain region.

The 1932 city report noted that the system of scenic drives, which were begun in the previous administration, were now completed, and "immediately sprang into favor". The park board now controlled over 150 acres according to the report (compared with the 180 acres reported in 1927). Like many other cities during this period, however, unemployment relief was a more pressing concern. Some of the work involved park property, particularly along the river. Another major federal project in Excelsior Springs had far greater consequences on the focal park, Siloam Gardens.

In 1933, the City petitioned the federal government for a loan and grant through the Public Works Administration. The funds were approved, and in 1935, a portion of this money was used to purchase the mineral water rights to the various approved springs and wells in the city. Black & Veatch, consulting engineers from Kansas City, prepared the plans for transporting the various mineral waters to the proposed Hall of Waters building. The building was planned by architects Keene & Simpson, structural engineer Erwin Pfhul, and mechanical engineer W.L. Cassell. Hare & Hare prepared the site plans. They also completed a planting plan in 1938 for Siloam Park. The construction of the Hall of Waters virtually eradicated the Kessler designed gardens around Siloam.

The division between the present parks of Fishing River Linear Park, East Valley Park, Isley Woods, and Siloam Mountain Park was never very clear. The most obvious reason for this is that their boundaries were adjoining. A publication released shortly after the opening of the Hall of Waters shows an aerial view of this building in "the hundred acre park in which it is located", obviously indicating a blurring of the boundary lines between the four parks. However, at some point after the Hall of Waters was constructed, the parks began to be considered as separate.

Although playground equipment, recreational features, and new shelter houses have been constructed since this period at the historic parks of Excelsior Springs, virtually no new major construction has occurred there. New parks have been added to the city's holdings, primarily in outlying areas of the city.

Drive system The driveway system, although perhaps never officially adopted as "park land", was nonetheless one of the key selling points of the park system in all publications in the first half of the twentieth century. One of its notable features was that it allowed "for the uninterrupted passage of pleasure traffic between the extreme eastern and western town limits without entering the business district." The scenic driveway system was considered completed in 1932 according to the City's annual report. Again, due to the lack of complete documentation, it is uncertain what this means. Additional questions remain unanswered as to what, exactly, was planned for the drive system. Were the drives officially under the jurisdiction of the Park Board, or were they merely adorned streets, which happened to lead to parks?

The importance of the park drive system in the promotional schemes of Excelsior Springs is evident in a publication printed a few years after Kessler was hired by the City. It lauded Kessler's plans and the city's establishment of the driveway system complete with "concrete arch bridges and paved drives which form a part of the extensive park and driveway system."

This park and driveway system now provides for the uninterrupted passage of pleasure traffic between the extreme eastern and western town limits without entering the business district. Few cities can boast of a similar system with more pleasing points of view. Dunbar and Kimball Avenues wind around the rim of the valley and by easy grades descend the face of the western hills; the South Valley, which in Siloam Park runs along the stream -- an ideal shaded mile of luxuriant foliage -- merges into Golf Hill Drive, ascends through a forest glen and around the brow of the eastern hills, a new vista at every turn . . . True artistic feeling is evident throughout the completed work, there is not hint of the artificial, the drives flow along lines that display the region's native beauty and leave the charm unspoiled. These drives will

connect with the 202 miles of oiled macadam roads for the constructions of which Clay County voted a bond issue of \$1,500,000 in June, 1916. These roads radiate in every direction from the Springs, and its residents and visitors will have for their use one of the most extensive and attractive driveway systems to be found anywhere.

By the 1930's, when the Chamber of Commerce published its Golden Jubilee book, the driveway system was considered complete. Several photographs of the system were included in this publication, as well as a lengthy description. Even accounting for the typical promotional tones that these types of publications adopt, it is evident from the photos and descriptions that the driveway system was an extremely significant part of the community. The following description, taken from that publication, provides an excellent description of the existing conditions in the 1930's.

Outstanding in the beautification program is the extensive park and driveway system extending from the extreme western entrance, where a beautiful gateway built of native stone by the Civic Improvement Association bids welcome from the Kansas City road east to the broad expanse of Golf Hill and Siloam Gardens.

Entering Excelsior Springs by bus or motor, one passes through the simple, charming entrance with pillars of stone surmounted by electric light standards and surrounded by a small, well-planned bit of parking, sodded and planted in graceful, sweeping lines of spirea and other flowering shrubs. Once inside the city, a broad expansive lawn dotted with trees and shrubbery will soon unfold around the United States Veterans' Bureau hospital with the completion of the government beautification plan.

Opposite the hospital, "horse shoe curve", with its white-chatted walks standing out in bold relief against luxuriant blanket of green, catches the eye of the motorist. beautification of this triangular junction of St. Louis, Wildwood and Kimball Avenues is the project of the Lions Club and its members have faithfully taken care of the plot.

A rugged wall of rock guarding over an excellently well cared for stretch of lawn, which opens onto a gracefully designed tract encircled by hedge and hardy perennials at the foot of government hospital on the left is in charge of the Kiwanis Club. Strikingly in contrast, is the rolling plot of closely mowed grass on the opposite side of the street. Clusters of roses planted by the Civic Improvement Association overhangs the shelter there. From this point, two routes are available to the sightseer. Going over the paved rocky promontory past the

Wyman-Junior high school and Sunnyside Park, a brilliance of natural beauty awaits the arrival at the Milwaukee station.

Starting from the heart of the city, the valley parkway winds for more than a mile in Siloam Park, through a native forest in which the wild growth of shrubs and vines and trees is left unspoiled. In springtime, there is a mass of varied bloom of red-bud, wild crab apple, dogwood and hawthorne and the tender tints of bursting buds. In summer the cool green shade of towering forest trees and in autumn there is a blaze of crimson, russet and gold.

The Valley Parkway merges into the Golf Hill drive which ascends through a wooded glen, then curves around the rim of the eastern upland to the clubhouse of the Excelsior Springs Golf Club on Golf Hill, which stands 200 feet above the city and 1,000 feet above sea level. You can see the Missouri River ten miles away, and the blue hills beyond, and in every direction, as far as the eye can reach, the scene is one of enchanting restful beauty. (Golden Jubilee" America's Haven of Health, 1930)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Research

The documentation of historic landscapes is always at best difficult. Documentation of construction and alterations are generally rare. As just one example, the types of permits which often document historic buildings were not required for landscapes. This, combined with the lack of record-keeping which is typical of small cities, has compounded the problem of documenting the historic park system of Excelsior Springs. However, it is critical that thorough documentation be completed before an accurate evaluation of the significance of historic landscapes can be undertaken.

In the course of inventorying Excelsior Springs' historic park system, several sources were reviewed (noted earlier in the "Research Design"). Some of these sources have been thoroughly exhausted. A few, however, may still have the potential to yield additional information. With the recent cataloguing of city documents, it is doubtful that any more information will be discovered at the city hall. However, the Parks Department is located in a separate building. The acting director, Steve Zimmerman, believes that there may be some documents in the attic, but these were not available at the time of the survey. No drawings were found in the Kessler Files at the Missouri Historic Society in St. Louis. The offices of Oschner, Hare & Hare still retain some historic documents, but projects dating before 1950 are uncatalogued. Some early plans were found and graciously copied for this project. However, further investigation along this line may be warranted, especially as the existing conditions around the Hall of Waters appear to have associations with Hare & Hare, not Kessler. The material at the Excelsior Springs Historical Museum is also uncatalogued. It is possible that some information regarding the parks system may be found in the material currently stored in the basement. Finally, private citizens may retain some historic documents which could come to light in future years. For example, no minutes of the Park Board have been discovered. Perhaps relatives of former members may have copies of these. It will be important to continue to pursue any information regarding the park system.

Historic Designation

Local designation The development of the Excelsior Springs park and drive system is clearly tied to historic context presented in Excelsior Springs' Historic Resources: Survey Plan report -- "Excelsior Springs - Missouri's National Health Resort: 1880-1963." The parks were either developed around the mineral water springs, to provide camping for the numerous visitors/tourist to the community, or to provide recreational amenities for the visitors. It was virtually unheard of at this period for a community of Excelsior Springs' size to construct not just one park, but an entire system. The historic landscapes inventoried for this project would be eligible for designation under the local historic preservation ordinance of Excelsior Springs.

National Register of Historic Places In the individual survey sheets for each landscape, preliminary evaluation is presented on its historic landscape integrity. However, historic site plans were not found for the majority of the parks. In addition, no park board minutes or annual reports were available. The main sources of documentation for the parks were the George E. Kessler Files, newspapers, and the numerous promotional publications about Excelsior Springs. This presented a problem in attempting to evaluate the integrity of many of the parks and drives. However, on-site observations (age of tree stands, for example) and comparison with the data that was found did permit a preliminary evaluation of the park resources for their eligibility to the National Register. The following parks would probably be individually eligible for listing: Siloam Mountain Park, East Valley Park/Isley Woods, Fishing River Linear Park, and the Excelsior Springs Golf Course. Sunnyside Park may be eligible as a contributing resource to a historic district. Of the drive system, Dunbar, the "horseshoe" drives (Wildwood and a portion of St. Louis Avenues), and Golf Course drive are also probably individually eligible. Regent and Elms Boulevard would be contributing features in a historic district. However, the most logical and economical approach to a National Register nomination would be the preparation of Multiple Property cover document which covers the entire development of the town. The parks and driveways would be identified as property types, and thus nominated as individual sites or districts. Further research will be necessary in order to more accurately determine individual eligibility, but the above mentioned resources would at the minimum be contributing features to a historic district.

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| REFERENCE NUMBER | A. HISTORIC NAME | B. COUNTY | C. ADDRESS |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| | Hoffman Hotel/ Victoria Hotel | Clay | 106 Saratoga |

T. The hotel was built c.1911 on land platted in 1887. The date of 1911 is an estimation based on the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. The 1900-1909 Sanborns do not show this building, although the 1900-1905 do show a pavilion structure for the Saratoga Springs located at what would be the southwest corner of the future hotel building. The present buildings appears on the 1913 Sanborn as the Hoffman Hotel. By the 1922 City Directory, it is listed as the Victoria Hotel. The c.1933 "Official Map of Excelsior Springs" lists the Victoria Hotel as having 12 rooms renting from \$3-\$6 per week. The 1926 Sanborn map show that this building had a large, one story addition to its southwest side which has recently been removed. A historic postcard shows the former front porch, which was a deep, full-length, two-story porch. There were classical columns on both the first and second story, and the second story roof of the porch had a shallow-pitched roof.

2X. This three story, three bay hotel building has a limestone foundation, brick walls and a flat, tar and gravel roof. There is evidence of a porch in the anchor holes seen just below the second story fenestration on the main facade. The light yellow brick walls were recently sandblasted to remove green paint. The main entrance is located in the center bay of the main facade. A two story tripartite bay with a flat roof is centered on the south facade. The third story, formerly wood shingles, is covered in vinyl siding. All windows are recent vinyl replacements, and three windows on the third floor of the main facade have multi-light sashes. The interior was completely gutted except for the staircase in the current renovation project, which is attempting to provide housing for the homeless. The hotel, formerly Classical Revival in its architectural detailing, still retains brackets and dentils on the cornice area under the wide, overhanging roof eaves.

2Y. Located on a small lot in a densely populated district among homes of similar construction.

2Z. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1894-1940--Kansas City, MO Public Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections; Excelsior Springs City Directories and Phone Books--Excelsior Springs Museum; Plats and Additions files--City Planning Department, City of Excelsior Springs, MO; Miscellaneous files and reference materials--Excelsior Springs Museum.

| REFERENCE NUMBER | A. HISTORIC NAME | B. COUNTY | C. ADDRESS |
|--|------------------|-----------|--------------|
| | Campbell Inn | Clay | 115 Saratoga |
| <p>T. The house was built c.1920 on land platted in 1887. The date of 1920 is an estimation based on the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and the City Directories. On the 1913 Sanborn map, a 1½ story irregular plan home of probable Victorian-era construction is shown. The present buildings shows up on the 1926 map as the "Campbell Inn rooming house". The Campbell Inn appears at this address in the 1922 Directory (the 1917 directory is missing the pages for Saratoga street). Subsequent maps indicate that this house has not had any additions from 1926 through 1942, although the Sanborns do reveal a full-width, one-story wood porch which is no longer extant. The City Directory for 1922 shows Mrs. M.E. Campbell as owner/occupant of the Campbell House. The 1940 phone book lists H.N. Cramer at the address.</p> | | | |
| <p>2X. This 2½ story home has a limestone foundation, aluminum siding and a moderate-pitched gable-front roof. The overhanging roof eaves are open with exposed rafters, and there are knee braces under the eaves of the gable-front. There is a narrow, recessed porch at the far northern end which leads to one of the three entrances on the main facade. The steps to the uncovered, open porch are centrally located. The three entrances are located at the north, south and central bays. A ribbon of three double hung windows are located in the apex of the roofline. Gable dormers face north and south.</p> | | | |
| <p>2Y. Located on a small lot in a densely populated district among homes of similar construction.</p> | | | |
| <p>2Z. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1894-1940--Kansas City, MO Public Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections; Excelsior Springs City Directories and Phone Books--Excelsior Springs Museum; Plats and Additions files--City Planning Department, City of Excelsior Springs, MO; Miscellaneous files and reference materials--Excelsior Springs Museum.</p> | | | |

| REFERENCE NUMBER | A. HISTORIC NAME | B. COUNTY | C. ADDRESS |
|------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|
| | The Montclare | Clay | 109 Saratoga |

T. The house was built c.1899 on land platted in 1887. The estimated construction date is based on available data from the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and the City Directories; it is possible the house was constructed earlier. The 1894 Sanborn does not extend this far west in 1894. In 1900, a one-story dwelling appears with a rear, one-story addition. The same basic footprint remains for nearly fifty years, but the building's height apparently is altered. In 1905 it remains listed as a one-story dwelling, but in 1909 and 1913, the same footprint appears for a 1½ story house (the present building might be considered by some to be 1½ stories). In 1926 and 1942 it appears as a two-story rooming house, "The Montclare", with a small one-story addition at the south rear of the buildings. It also appears as "The Montclare" in the 1922 Directory (the 1917 directory at the Excelsior Springs Museum is missing the pages for Saratoga street). The c.1933 "Official Map of Excelsior Springs" lists the Montclare Apartments as having 16 rooms renting from \$4.50-\$5 per week. The 1940 phone book lists Bessie Scott at the address.

2X. This 2½ story, three bay home has a limestone foundation, asbestos shingle siding and a moderate-pitched side gable roof. The shallow shed porch roof is full-length, and is supported by four simple classical columns and the porch railings consist of steel pipe. The porch steps are centrally located, as is the main entrance, which is flanked by sidelights. There is a 1/1, double-hung window on both sides of the entry door with wood plank shutters. The second story has a door in the central bay, flanked by two windows. Two shed roofed dormers with paired double hung windows are located on the outer bays of the main facade. Aluminum awnings shade the second story windows at the outer bays.

2Y. Located on a small lot in a densely populated district among homes of similar construction.

2Z. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1894-1940--Kansas City, MO Public Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections; Excelsior Springs City Directories and Phone Books--Excelsior Springs Museum; Plats and Additions files--City Planning Department, City of Excelsior Springs, MO; Miscellaneous files and reference materials--Excelsior Springs Museum.