

## Municipal Forests of Keller Park

By Bob Jensen

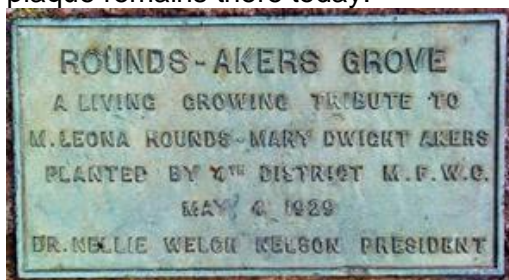
In the November newsletter, I spoke of the George Washington Memorial Grove. But this was only one of five groves in Keller Park planted by the 4th District of Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs between 1927 – 1932. What was this organization and where are the other four groves?

In the late 1920's, the 4<sup>th</sup> District consisted of 40 women's clubs in Ramsey County (none in New Canada Township) to promote the advancement of women in an era before they were given the right to vote. They also advocated conservation and were influential in the creation of the Chippewa National Forest in northern MN. Gifford Pinchot, who was the first head of the U.S. Forest Service, had this to say about their involvement in the National Forest: "Here was the first application of forestry to government-owned forests in America. Without the farsighted and patriotic support of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, it would have been impossible."

On May 2, 1927, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved a request from the 4<sup>th</sup> District to reforest the non-productive land in Keller Park by planting a "municipal forest" on 13 ½ acres. Red and white pines would be planted on the higher ground with spruce, tamarack and birch in the lowland. On May 14, 3,000 trees were planted by 40 Boy Scouts in the area circled in this 1940 aerial photo.



In 1928, another 3,000 trees were planted at this site and on May 4, 1929, a plaque was dedicated for the "Rounds-Akers Grove" in memory of the two ladies responsible for creating the grove. This plaque remains there today.



The newspaper on that date stated this is one of few plantations actually started in Minnesota, except in the Superior and Chippewa national forests.

A third grove was also started on May 4, 1929 when 27 American Elms were planted along Keller creek about ½ way between Lake Phalen and Lake Keller – just north of today's WPA dam and next to where Honeymoon Falls once existed. This was called Memory Grove and a plaque was dedicated here in 1932 in memory of 27 local and state leaders of the 4<sup>th</sup> District. The plaque no longer exists at the site, although the rock is still there. The below 1940 aerial photo identifies the location and the second photo shows the plaque before it went missing.



And on that same day, May 4, 1929, 2,500 white and Norway pines were planted at a fourth grove that was ½ mile east of Keller creek between Frost Avenue and the Soo Line Railroad tracks – where today's Flicek Park is located. However a newspaper article in 1932 said this grove "has suffered from drought and vandalism." This and the construction of a parking lot and ball fields may explain why no pines exist here today. There is no reference to a plaque installed at this site.

A fifth grove was started on May 10, 1930, when 5,000 trees were planted on the "Anna O'Toole Island in Keller Lake." At that time there were two islands, one that still exists at the intersection of County Road B and Highway 61 and another that later became part of the causeway where Highway 36 crosses Keller Lake. We don't know which island was planted but neither site has a tree plantation of that size today. There also is no reference to a plaque installed at this site.

The Outdoor Life Committee responsible for these groves ceased to exist after 1938. Today the only evidence of their actions are the two plaques and a small pine plantation near the Rounds-Akers Grove. Plans are being made to replace the Washington Grove plaque near its original location and re-dedicate it on Arbor Day on May 16, 2015. Perhaps a few disease-resistant elms will also be planted on the site. The concept of reforestation that the 4<sup>th</sup> District helped initiate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century remains a part of modern conservation practices.

**This article courtesy of Maplewood Area Historical Society.**