

WHERE WAS THE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL GROVE?

By Bob Jensen

As a frequent runner around Lake Phalen, Bob Cardinal had seen the Washington Memorial Grove plaque prominently displayed alongside Frost Avenue next to the bridge over Keller Creek. He also saw that in 1981 it was moved about 150 yards south to the edge of the marsh during road construction and that it was never moved back. The years slipped by until this August when with the help of his sons he turned the rock on its side to verify it had a brass plaque. He showed it to Public Works and they retrieved it to their yard where it sits today as in the below photo. What is the story behind this Washington Grove memorial?



Courtesy of Ginny Gaynor

The story begins in May, 1927 when the local district of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Club obtained permission from Ramsey County to establish a municipal forest in several plots of Keller Park to promote conservation and reforestation. In 1931, they obtained permission from the County to plant ten American elm trees on the slope where the Frost Avenue Bridge crossed Keller Creek. However, it was not until May 7, 1932 that the grove was dedicated to celebrate the bicentennial of George Washington's birthday of February 22, 1732.

The below photo shows the unveiling of the large rock with brass plaque. The three children were direct descendants of Augustine Washington, a half-brother of George Washington. The lady to the right is Mrs. C.N. Akers who was a great-granddaughter of a chaplain who served in Washington's army at Valley Forge. She and the other lady, Mrs. Russell E. Van Kirk, led the tree-planting committee.



Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

Aerial photos from 1940 and video from the 1950's show the elms in the triangular area of land between Frost Avenue on the north, the exit ramp to Keller Parkway on the south and Keller Parkway on the west. They apparently flourished until 1981 when the exit ramp was removed and Keller Parkway was replaced with a paved path along Keller Creek. We envision it was easier for the contractor to shove the rock into the woods than haul it away. He may even have deliberately rolled the plaque to the underside in an attempt to keep vandals from loosening the brass for resale. And there it sat for 33 years until Mr. Cardinal rediscovered it.

The question is what to do with the rock. Most of the elms are gone – succumbed either to road construction, old age or Dutch elm disease. Is the memorial to our first President still relevant? Should it be located close to its original location? Please send your suggestions to the editor for forwarding to the City authorities.

This article is courtesy of Maplewood Area Historical Society.