

# Glenwood Children's Park



*From Quarry  
to Landmark*

To be kept with  
Glenwood Children's Park  
"Scrap" book

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to Landmark*

October, 1999  
Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association

## To Jens

**Preface** Ten years ago, upon completing my senior thesis in landscape architecture, I left the country and the world of college behind, never thinking that anything would happen with the project I had worked so hard on. Afterall, how many student projects were ever realized?

But my project was a restoration plan for Jens Jensen's Glenwood Children's Park, an historically significant work by a major figure in American landscape architecture. And my client was the Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association, an organization with a reputation for getting things done.

So I shouldn't be surprised that 1999 marked a new beginning for the little park that could, a small piece of land cherished by a few, but ignored by most. An amazing collaborative effort, spearheaded by the Parks Committee of the Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association, has begun to restore the park to it's former glory, and implement portions of Jensen's plan that never came to be.

I am happy to see the rich history of this landscape has made it into written form, an effort that will undoubtedly increase the reader's appreciation for a little chunk of Madison that celebrates a spirited human effort to collaborate with nature.

Jon Adams-Kollitz  
September, 1999

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*With gratitude to all who have been a part of  
Glenwood Children's Park's history.*

## A Long Time Ago

The wooded ravine south of the old railroad corridor near Glenway Golf Course, just two blocks up from Monroe Street, has remained one of Madison's best kept secrets through the years. But step back in time to a Friday morning in October of 1949, and you will find the slopes of the park ringed with children eagerly awaiting the dedication of an outdoor treasure created just for them.

The 3 1/2 acre park was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's contemporary and sometime collaborator Jens Jensen. Jensen, known in his own right as the "dean of American landscape architects" and the "father of naturalistic landscaping" was born in Denmark in 1860 and emigrated to America at the age of 24. In a career that spanned more than 50 years, he became internationally renowned for designing numerous parks and private estates as well as for his role in establishing the Illinois state parks system and the Cook County forest preserves. Jensen also served as a consultant to President Theodore Roosevelt on conservation affairs and helped set aside many natural and scientific study areas in the Midwest.

The triangle of land Jensen transformed into Glenwood Children's Park originated as a quarry a century before. Consequently, it provides a unique window into the Earth's geological history. The open pit quarry exposed an almost 20 foot section of the "layer cake" of sedimentary bedrock that underlies Madison. The stack of layers is not overturned, so the oldest rocks are on the bottom. The sequence consists of sandstones, limestones, and dolomites. Some of the blocks of sandstone still contain holes made by "star drills," an early type of tool that allowed a miner to hammer blasting powder holes into solid rock by hand.

The lowest and oldest rocks exposed in the glen are poorly cemented sandstones deposited in a shallow sea about 520 million years ago, during the latest Cambrian Period when Wisconsin was located at the equator! They can be seen at the storm drain located southwest of Glenwood Park's stone council ring. Too crumbly for building material, these rocks indicate why the quarry went no deeper.

called the “sand pit” by Beatrice and Dorothy Schumacher and the other neighborhood children who used it for a playground. It was then that prominent Madison lawyer Michael Olbrich noticed the site while surveying land along Monroe Street for the new University of Wisconsin Arboretum.

## Development

Attorney Michael Olbrich, who devoted much of his life to beautifying Madison with parks and playgrounds, died in 1929 but left his files describing the “little glen or dell” with its exposed ledges of sandstone, miniature canyons, and ravines to the future Madison Chamber of Commerce. Besides the old rock walls of the quarry there remained the rocky bed of a stream that ran down the hillside before the area was built up. In addition, many beautiful trees – oaks, elms, black locusts – shrubs, ferns, and wild flowers made the spot a bit of wild, undisturbed outdoors that fairly longed to be converted to a more useful purpose and fittingly named “Glenwood.”

Olbrich’s interest was kept alive by William Longenecker. Longenecker, UW professor of landscape architecture and the first director of the arboretum, was a long-time friend of Jens Jensen. By the late 1930s Longenecker had convinced civic leader “Colonel” Joseph W. Jackson, manager of the Jackson Clinic and a founder of both the arboretum and James Madison Park, to consider the little dell at Glenway and Cross Streets for a park. Jackson, in turn, persuaded his friend Louis Gardner Sr., owner of Gardner Baking Company to buy the land and donate it to the city. As a result, in 1943 Madison received the former quarry as a gift although the Gardners chose to be anonymous benefactors. The land surrounding the city’s new acquisition remained part of the Briar Hill district of the Town of Madison.

Meanwhile, Jackson invited Jens Jensen to come down from his Door County home to take a look at the site located just a few blocks from the Kenneth Jensen Wheeler Council Ring that Jensen had placed in the arboretum near Lake Wingra in memory of his grandson. After his visit, Jensen wrote, “The glen should be left

alone, or rather restored to its former self, and thereby show grownups—and children, too—the beauties of their native land.”

Seeing tremendous potential in the forgotten parcel, Jensen generously volunteered his time and effort to transform it into Glenwood Children’s Park. “Yes,” he said, “it is good. It will not be the biggest children’s park in America, but maybe we can make it the best. I planned the first one. Maybe this will be the last one that I plan. So I will put my heart into it.” Jensen was in his eighties by then, and this was, indeed, his last major project.

Jensen returned to inspect the glen with James Marshall, Madison’s parks superintendent. After making notes on the

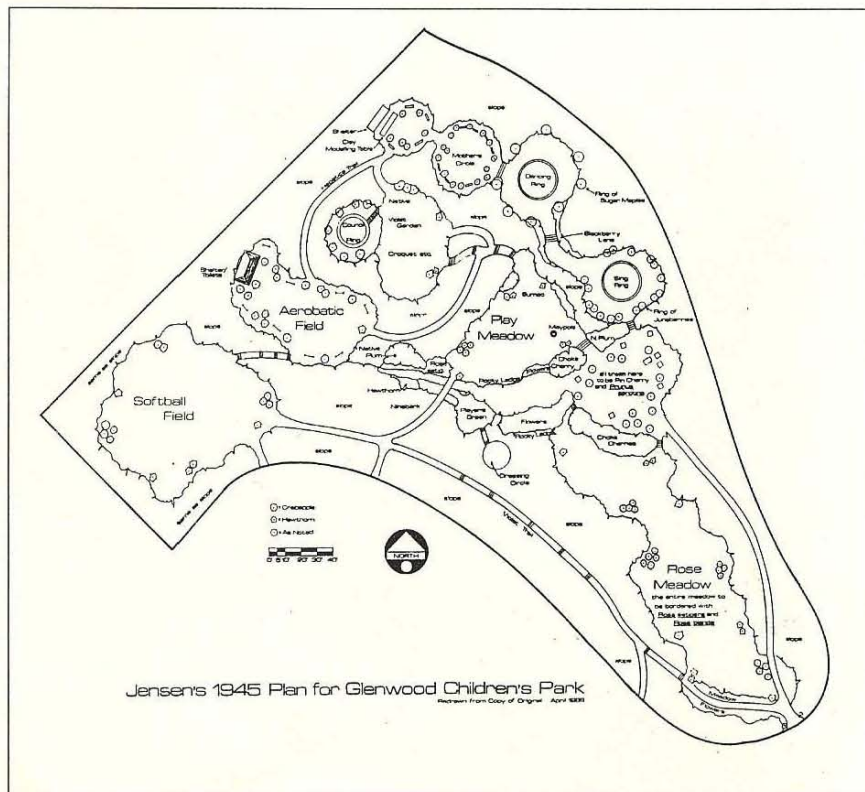


William Meurer

*The land Mrs. Southworth remembers as “roots, rocks and rubbish” before development.*

drainage and grading, he requested a plot plan and photographs of the various features on the site. Jensen then drew up his planting plan, including spot elevations for areas to be designed, but never submitted a grading plan. Instead all the earth-moving was carried out by Marshall and his crew following Jensen's suggestions. For the time being, though, World War II prevented any construction.

After the war, in 1946 Mrs. Ruth Southworth and her family moved to a home in suburban Briar Hill just two doors from the former quarry, which she described as "roots, rocks and rubbish." Runoff from postwar development of the adjacent Westmorland subdivision was eroding the roots and rocks while scofflaws had treated the site as a dump because "nobody was looking out for it then,"



Jon Adams-Kollitz

*A redrawing of Jensen's original plan.*

Mrs. Southworth recalled. An effort was underway to annex the area to the City of Madison in order to provide municipal services to the area. Resident Alice Kemp helped with that effort and in turn enlisted her neighbor Ruth Southworth, who wrote the petition that succeeded in bringing the area from Western Avenue to Odana Road into the city.

In 1947 Superintendent Marshall's workers planted several hundred small trees along the side slopes of the glen, but implementation of Jensen's plan did not begin until after annexation. Jensen himself returned in 1948 to supervise the removal of a number of trees in order to create forest clearings, little islands of sunlight in the dark woods. Many trees were cut, alarming some neighbors, but Jensen maintained the cutting was necessary to expose and enhance the beauty that was already there. For Jensen, the contrast between light and darkness was one of the basics of landscape architecture.



William Meuer

*After development, an open area of the young park.*



William Meuer

*Situated on top of a constructed mound, the council ring offered a view of Lake Wingra.*

Jensen's goal was to reestablish a forest understory of sugar maple and ironwood beneath the remaining trees, and his method was to plug in the ecologically proper native plantings for the area and let nature take its course. Consequently he recommended planting maples and other shade-tolerant trees beneath the existing oaks, knowing that the maple forest, if left undisturbed, eventually would supplant the oak. In this deceptively simple manner he achieved his artistic ends by following natural principles. Later he would add accent plants such as hawthorns or a group of sumac. Jensen preferred hawthorns because of their human scale and their horizontal branching reminiscent of outstretched arms.

Jensen's design also called for some minor grade changes to highlight the existing topography. He made only one rough sketch of the area, preferring to eyeball the elevations, which he sometimes altered to expose or enhance the rock outcroppings. Parks department trucks shuttled back and forth throughout the summer removing rubbish and debris.

Jensen's parks often included a council ring inspired by the egalitarian, or democratic, traditions of both his native Denmark's folk school and the Native Americans. Here he sited a ring of stone benches surrounding a central fire circle on a mound in the upper part of the park with a view of Lake Wingra in the distance. Kendall Niebuhr and Keith Lawler were two young Madison firemen who heard by word-of-mouth of the job to build the council ring. They were hired by Franz Aust, who handed them a chisel and hammer and said "Cut that!" Mrs. Southworth's young son, who watched the workers every day insisted on taking over a lunch pail just like the worker's to join them when they stopped to eat, breaking three thermos bottles by his mother's count in the course of the park's development.

Jensen returned in April of 1949 to supervise volunteers and high school members of the Madison Youth Council in planting shade bush, cherries, plums, and hawthorns. Working together, they created sunlit open spaces, outdoor rings, a playground, a softball field, and croquet space in addition to the council ring for meetings.



William Meuer

*Jensen and the Madison Youth Council volunteers.*

Jensen's directions, though sometimes time consuming, were easily followed. Parks chief Marshall found him observant, capable, and, contrary to the experiences of some people, very easy to work with and open to suggestions while remaining committed to his principal ideas. As for Jensen's methods, Marshall remembered that with a sweep of a hand towards a bare bank he would say, "Now you plant that solid with plum." Mrs. Southworth, too, recalled frequently seeing the octogenarian Jensen in the park that summer "waving his arms around."

On Friday morning October 7, 1949, some 700 people gathered in the completed park for a formal dedication ceremony. Among them were large contingents of students from Dudgeon and Our Lady Queen of Peace schools. City Manager Leonard Howell declared, "This is our park, because a man and his family thought enough of this city of ours to share in the teamwork it takes to make a better city in which to live." Howell went on to explain that the man and his family had bought the land for the city and had



William Meuer

October 7th, 1949.



William Meuer

*Front row: Marta Reese, Linda Gardner, Mrs. Reed Davis Gardner, Mrs. Louis Gardner Sr., Mr. Louis Gardner Sr., Mr. Leonard G. Howell  
Back row: Mr. James Marshall, Mr. Phillip Falk, Mrs. Ruth Gardner Reese, Mr. Louis (Speed) Gardner, Jr., (unknown young man) Father Francis O'Donnell, Rev. Richard Pritchard, Mr. Herbert Schenk.*

provided the money to make it into a park while the youngsters of the city had "joined the team" to clean up the grounds and plant shrubs.

In a surprise twist, the donors were identified as the three children of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Gardner—Louis Gardner, Jr., Ruth Gardner Reese, and Martha Gardner Wernig. Louis "Speed" Gardner, Jr., took the microphone and, as his family looked on, broke six years of silence about their contribution: "An immigrant left his native land in 1881, coming to this country, and here he prospered. He told his children the value and the necessity of doing something for the country in which he lived, and they, in turn, passed that belief down to their children. We hope that other chil-

dren will be inspired, so that they too, may know the satisfaction of doing something to improve the land in which they live." He urged the assembled young people to take an active part in maintaining the beauty of nature so as to gain strength of character as well as mental, spiritual, and physical strength.

Flanked by hawthorns, a large boulder was placed at the lower end of the park, with a plaque affixed to it bearing the following dedication:

Glenwood Children's Park  
For children to enjoy nature at its best  
Presented by the children of  
Mr. & Mrs. Louis Gardner  
Ruth Gardner Reese - - Louis Gardner Jr.  
Martha Gardner Wernig  
"As you witness the touch of his hand in the wonders of  
nature you too will feel closer to God."  
Designed by Jens Jensen  
World Famous Landscape Architect  
Dedicated Oct. 7. 1949

Jensen, recovering from kidney surgery, was unable to attend the ceremony. He was sent a recording of the event and reportedly commented, "My dream has come true." Sadly he passed away two years later. In 1957 both Louis Gardner, Jr., and his mother were killed—and subsequently laid to rest not far from Glenwood in Forest Hill Cemetery—when the plane he was piloting crashed near Baraboo.

One summer day after the park opened, Louis Gardner drove by and thought that not enough children were playing there. Consulted once again, Mrs. Southworth knew that many children used the park in the winter for sledding and the topography was ideal for "chase games" during the rest of the year, but safety concerns made parents unwilling to let their children play there without park staff supervision. As a result, neighbors met at Dudgeon School, distributed flyers within a quarter mile of the park, and finally in 1957 ascertained there were enough children living nearby to warrant the installation of playground equipment and assignment of a half-time supervisor to the play area.

The park began to decline ecologically as the carefully planted vegetation was allowed to grow unchecked. Many of the original plantings were crowded out by "foreign" competition. Others succumbed to deepening shade as the trees matured. While the hill-sides became covered with more mud than grass, benches, other park furniture, and even the stone council ring fell into disrepair.

In 1963, with the contributions of so many—Michael Olbrich, William Longenecker, Joseph Jackson, the Gardners, Jens Jensen, and all the young people who helped build the park—apparently slipping away, Mrs. Southworth assembled a scrapbook documenting their efforts. Between inscribed leather covers she recorded the story of Glenwood's development and included photographer William Meuer's "before and after" pictures of the glen, capturing the young openness of the new children's park at its dedication. There also was one photograph taken in April 1949 of Jens in his

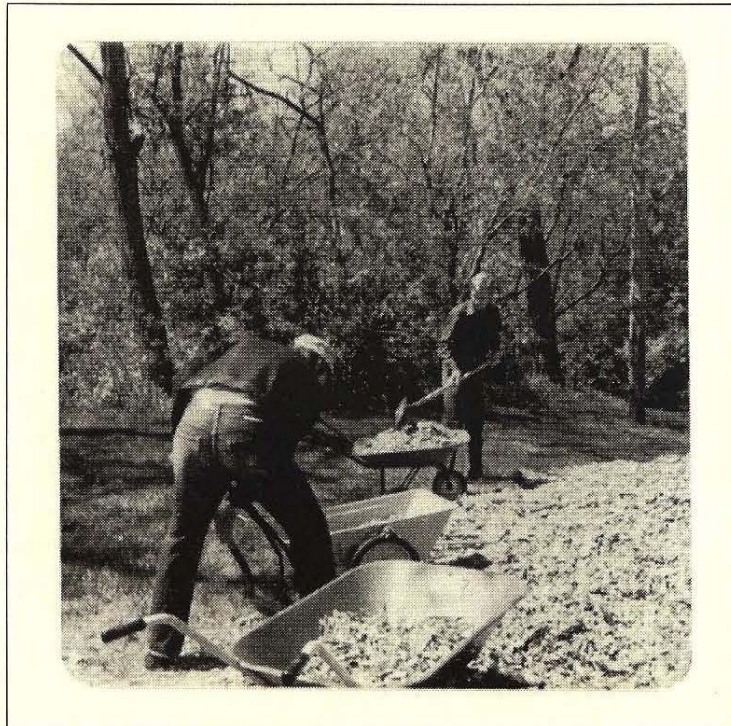


William Meuer

*"For children to enjoy nature at its best..."*

trademark beret with the Madison Youth Council volunteers in their trademark bobbysox, sitting around the council ring.

Scenes of the dedication ceremony featured the Gardner family as well as the hundreds of schoolchildren assembled there. Mrs. Southworth passed the album on to another neighbor for safekeeping and it eventually ended up thirty six years later entrusted to Jerry Paulson, who grew up in the neighborhood and had been one of the children pictured. In the meantime, continued growth of the neighborhood to the north increased the volume of water draining through the glen from a culvert under the adjacent railroad tracks. In the mid-1970s serious erosion problems and flooding of homes and garages on Cross Street led Alderman Nino Amato to obtain funds to improve the park's drainage and install a large grate and

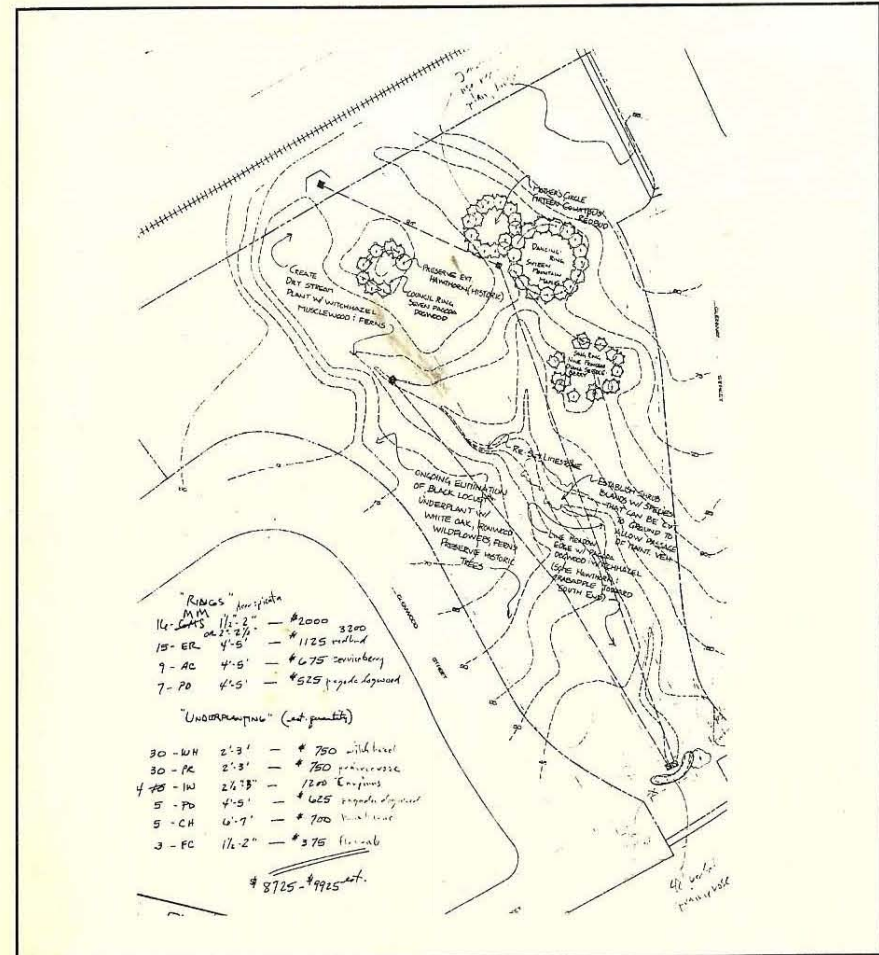


Sue Pope

1975 restoration volunteers Charles Miley and Larry Sommers.

earthen berm on the lower edge of the park. The upper portion of the park received far less attention.

In one of the earliest projects undertaken by the new Dudgeon-Monroe Neighborhood Association, in 1974 neighbors rallied to restore Glenwood to its former glory, organizing work parties and raising funds to combat the ongoing erosion and decline of native plants in the understory. Professor Darrell Morrison of the university's landscape architecture department supervised the replanting.



Jon Adams-Kollitz

The 1999 restoration plan.



The following February the second year of neighborhood efforts began with another clean-up and replanting of native shrubs. Changes were made in plant materials used for the glen had become much shadier since Jensen's day and some of his sun-loving plants had died out. For example, volunteers planted shade tolerant pagoda dogwood where Jensen had specified hawthorns, preserving the horizontal branching of which Jensen was so fond and thus his original artistic intent. Their efforts were doubly rewarded in May 1975 with a Capital Community Citizens Orchid Award for "action that improved environmental quality in Madison and Dane County, Wisconsin" and designation of Glenwood Children's Park as a Madison Historic Landmark. Fortunately, a record of these accomplishments was kept by adding snapshots, volunteers' signatures, and the Orchid Award itself to the park's scrapbook.

Although D-MNA sponsored a third round of clean-up and planting in 1976, Glenwood again slipped into obscurity and became overgrown when the number of children in the neighborhood declined sharply and interest in the park diminished. The 1980s brought an inappropriate new interest with the introduction of mountain bikes, whose unauthorized use eroded the slopes.

By the late 1990s invasive exotic species such as garlic mustard, honeysuckle, and buckthorn were thriving. Large mature trees, mostly black locust, formed a dense canopy that blocked out light. Instead of ground cover in the central meadow area, there was only exposed soil. Compounding this problem, a drainage grate at the top of the rose meadow was not taking its share of water, so runoff washed across the low meadow. Continued mountain biking down the steep inclines throughout the park further contributed to the erosion.

In 1996 D-MNA parks committee chair Maggie Jungwirth reinstated the annual clean-ups and applied to the City of Madison Parks Division capital fund for money to restore Glenwood Park. Denied the first year, the application was submitted again in 1997. To gauge neighborhood interest and support, parks planning and resources supervisor Si Widstrand drew up a restoration proposal to present to an informational neighborhood meeting. After that meeting, Alderman Ken Golden, Widstrand and Jungwirth developed a survey that was mailed to park area residents in March 1997. The results of the survey showed strong support restoration.



*Volunteers Russ Phelps, Todd Peterson and Brian Pulvermacher digging holes.*

*The newly planted Dance Ring.*



Maggie Jungwirth

In light of the responses, the Parks Division decided to take some steps toward the proposed restoration. D-MNA chose repair of the park's stone council ring, as its 1997 capital fund drive project. The drive raised \$2000 in neighborhood contributions, which were matched by the People for Parks program for restoration of the council ring. Parks Division contracted with Northwestern Masonry and Stone, a neighborhood business that had done an excellent job of restoring stonework in nearby Hoyt Park.

In 1998 capital funds for Glenwood were once more requested from the Parks Division and very likely would have been granted if not for a cruel twist of fate. The first stage of the plan called for cutting selected mature trees, using heavy equipment during the winter when the ground was frozen, but, thanks to El Niño, the ground never froze hard enough for the use of that equipment so the funds for the work to follow were not granted.

Maggie Jungwirth, in consultation with local experts, passed along a restoration plan to the Parks Division. It was a senior thesis written in 1989 by Jon Adams-Kollitz, then a landscape architecture student at the University of Wisconsin. Adams-Kollitz, now proprietor of his own landscape architecture company Formecology, agreed to draw up a revised plan for the park. At the same time,

Professor William Tishler, also from the landscape architecture department, and his son had just collaborated on filming the documentary "Jens Jensen: A Natural History." Tishler agreed to discuss plans for Glenwood, and publicity surrounding release of the documentary awakened new interest in Jensen and his work.

In January 1999 the D-MNA parks chair held an informational meeting on the frozen ground of Glenwood, where Si Widstrand laid out the plan and indicated exactly which trees would be cut. The following month the black locusts and some other trees were removed to open up the canopy and make room for replanting in the spring. Then, Widstrand, Jon Adams-Kollitz, William Tishler, Maggie Jungwirth, landscape architecture professor John Harrington, and D-MNA president Bill Barker convened at the park to exchange ideas before Adams-Kollitz drew up the final plan.

Adams-Kollitz's plan adapted Jensen's original plan to today's conditions, in particular calling for more shade tolerant species. Again, pagoda dogwood substituted for Jensen's favored hawthorn trees. Other native species—hop hornbeam, witch hazel, native roses, and ironwood were scattered throughout the park. Three of the circles, or outdoor rooms from the original plan were to be planted, probably for the first time. The Mother's Circle, designed for mothers to sit in while their children picked violets for them, was to be planted with mountain maple. The largest, the Dance Ring, was to be planted with redbud and the Sing Ring with serviceberry. Pagoda dogwoods would encircle the council ring; roses would occupy the berm along the lower end of the park; and muscledwood, hop hornbeam and witch hazel were to be concentrated along the ravine. Funding would come from a March 1999 Parks Division grant of \$2,000, a D-MNA contribution of \$2,500, and People for Parks matching funds, for a total of \$7,000. With the money and plan in place, the work began.

On May 1, 1999, volunteers cleared the way for circles and pulled invasive garlic mustard. The Saturday before Mother's Day the hard-working group planted the Mother's Circle and Dance Ring as well as the pagoda dogwoods around the council ring and the roses at the lower end of the park. The next two weekends more pagoda dogwoods were scattered along the slopes and hophornbeam,

witchhazel and muscledwood were planted along the ravine. Over 130 new bushes and trees were planted in all. Herman Landscaping provided the nursery stock and installed the Sing Ring's serviceberry and three hawthorn trees that were too large for the volunteers to plant. Over the course of three weekends the park was transformed and given new life.

Throughout the summer of 1999 the volunteers continued to remove buckthorn and honeysuckle, pull weeds and clear out around the stonework that been overgrown for years. A group of children from Glenwood Moravian Church worked on clearing out the ravine. "No Bike" signs were posted in an effort to control the erosive mountain biking.

One night in July, a century old oak tree finally gave in and fell across the rose meadow. It had been there before the park was a park. It ended its reign there just as a new generation was planted to take it's place.

That summer, D-MNA parks volunteers were preparing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the dedication of Glenwood Children's Park. The current guardian of the park's scrapbook, Jerry Paulson, moved from the neighborhood in 1999 and presented the album to the D-MNA, providing the inspiration and invaluable source material for this commemorative history of the glen. In addition to this publication, the park got its own Web page for the occasion, something Jensen could not have imagined 50 years ago.

From the vantage point of its golden anniversary the future for Glenwood looks bright. Renewed interest in Jensen's career promises that the little park will not be forgotten again. Although the next 50 years certainly will bring more change, the legacy of Jens Jensen's last major work should remain.

