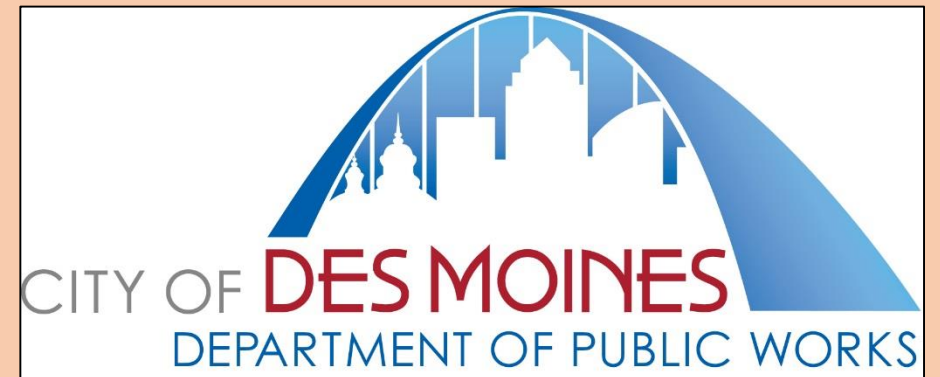


# History of Trees in Des Moines

## 1911-1940's

presented by City of Des Moines  
Department of Public Works  
Forestry Division



# RESEARCH CREDITS

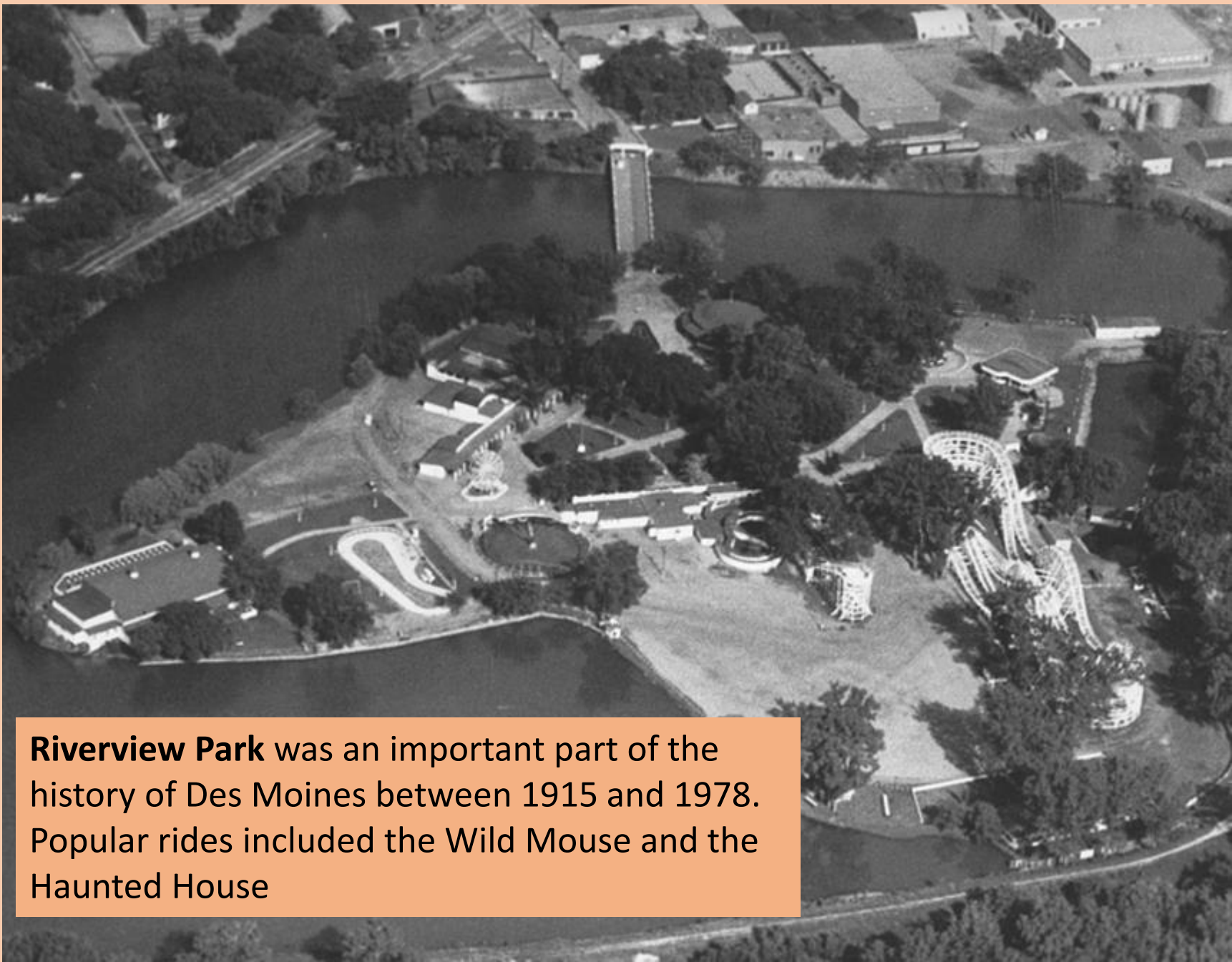
The research for this series of historical themes relating to Des Moines and trees in the city is limited to surveying the hard work of other people. The following sources, found at the State Library of Iowa and the State Historical Society of Iowa Research Center, were used to find this sampling of history.

- Images of America: Des Moines 1845-1920 by Craig S. McCue, 2006
- Images of America: East Village by Sarah C. Oltrogge, 2010
- Dynamic Des Moines: A History in Pictures by Allen Gardiner
- Postcard History Series: Des Moines by Craig S. McCue, 2007
- Then & Now: Des Moines by Craig S. McCue, 2012

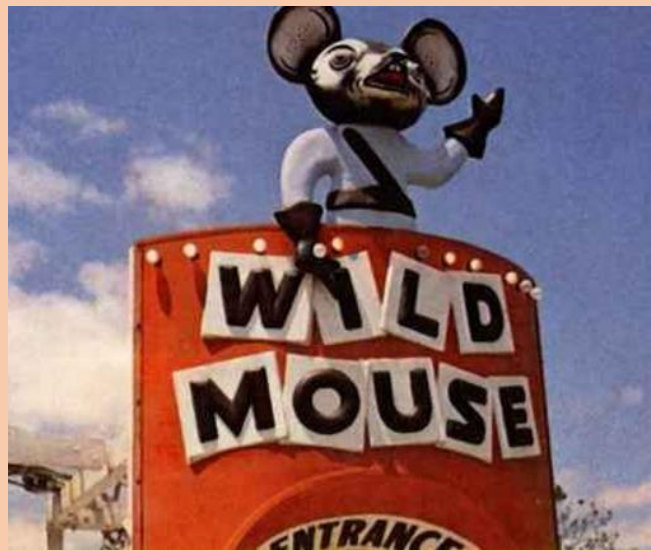
The general theme throughout this History of Trees in Des Moines, is to learn about the history of the city 'and' city trees. To that end, many photos have trees in them, or at least in the background.



**Streetcar Strike, 1911.** A conductor of the Des Moines City Railway was discharged for being 'two fares short.' Here, 5000 union workers assemble in front of streetcar offices to protest the lack of a full and complete hearing prior to dismissal.



**Riverview Park** was an important part of the history of Des Moines between 1915 and 1978. Popular rides included the Wild Mouse and the Haunted House





**Riverview Amusement Park Entrance.** The park opened in 1915 on the site of a former zoological garden. Though 1915 was one of the wettest summers on record, the park still enjoyed record crowds. It was a 'trolley park', filling the void left when Ingersoll Park closed.

1918 Aerial View

Riverview Park

Photo by Capt. Frank Ellsworth in  
the Officers Reserve Program at  
Fort Des Moines

(donated by University of Arkansas Libraries,  
Fayetteville, Arkansas  
8-16-1991)



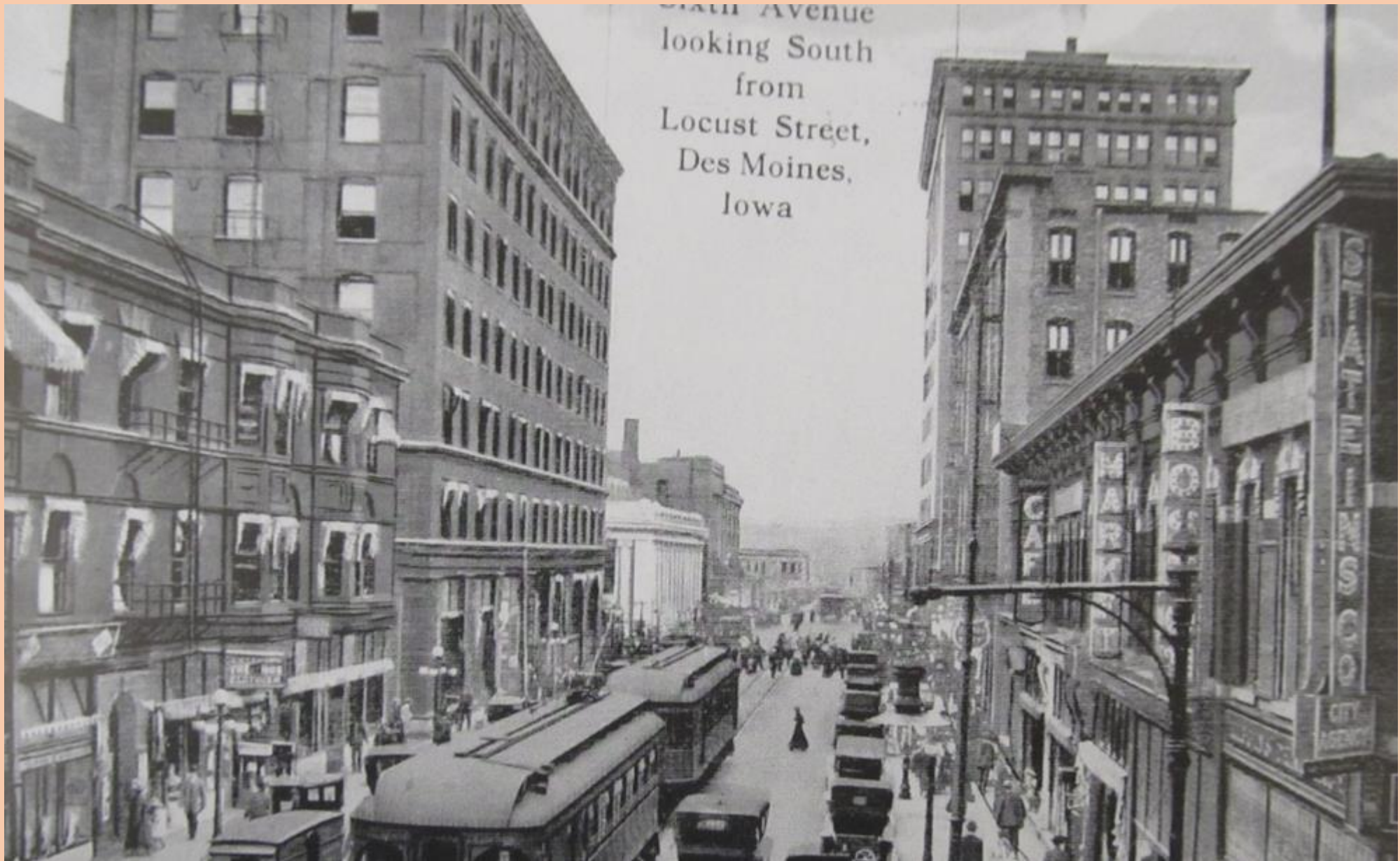


**Des Moines Ice Wagon.** Teamsters from the Des Moines Ice Company deliver ice and distilled water to residents through horse-drawn wagons. Because postcards of horse-drawn wagons were scarce, they are highly prized by collectors



**Trolley on Locust Street Bridge.** Early trolleys used an electric traction system, with power transferred via overhead wires. This was a safer linkage than the third-rail design used in many subways.





SIXTH AVENUE  
looking South  
from  
Locust Street,  
Des Moines,  
Iowa

Sixth Avenue, facing south from Locust Street. Check those wonderful electric street cars. No street trees downtown at this time.

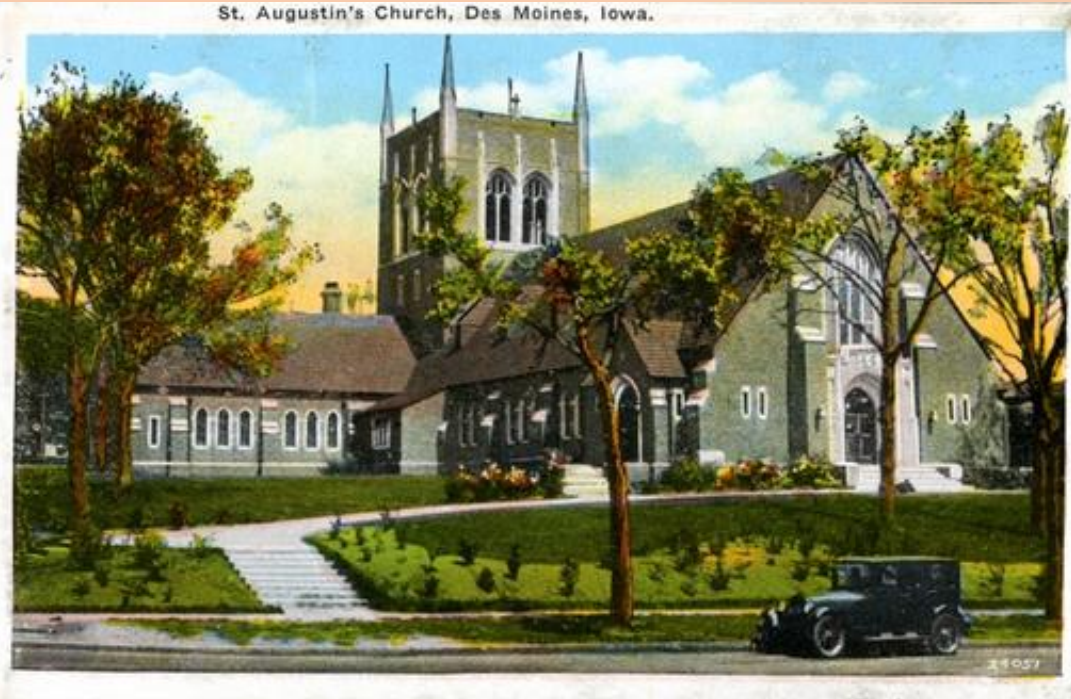


View looking northeast from the Brown Hotel. Photo predates the building of the auditorium.

The Brown Hotel and Garage was built in 1911 at the corner of Fourth St. and Keosauqua Way in Des Moines by Ernest Warren Brown. E.W. Brown managed the hotel until his death when his son Robert A. Brown took over. The Brown Marine Museum consisted of mounted, deep-sea specimens displayed in the Brown Hotel. The collection was meant to appeal to the sportsman and featured well-known and rare game fish from around the world.

Credit - <https://www.etsy.com/listing/492362138/brown-hotel-fourth-and-keo-des-moines>

St. Augustin's Church, Des Moines, Iowa.



St. Augustin's Church  
Des Moines, 1928

St. Augustin's Church  
Des Moines, 2017



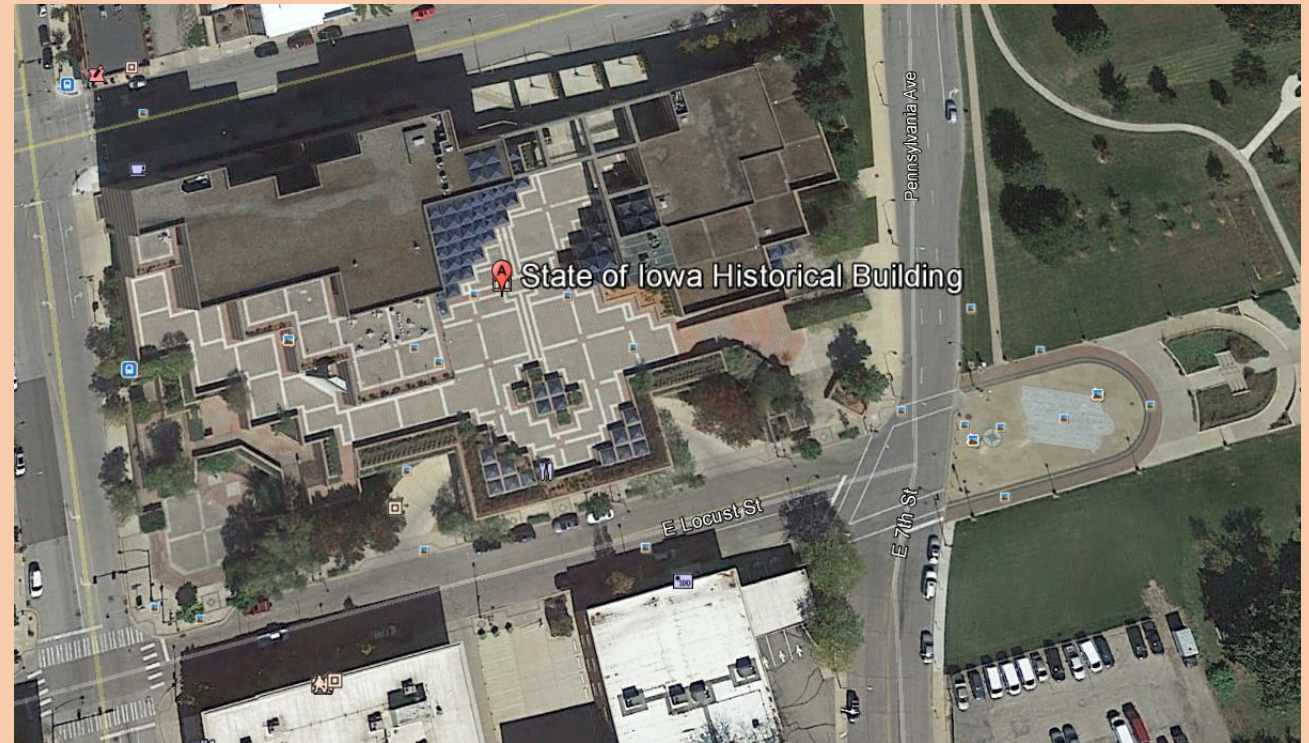
St Augustin's Catholic Church

Historical Building From Capitol, Des Moines, Iowa.



Historical Building, 1928  
Viewed from the Capitol

Aerial view of State of Iowa  
Historical Building, 2017



This photo shows the Iowa Historical Building looking north to the Capitol. Many of the photos in this history series were found in the archived records kept here by the Iowa Historical Society. The society preserves and provides access to Iowa's historical resources through a variety of statewide programs, exhibitions and projects while serving as an advocate for Iowa's past and connector to the future.





Soldiers Barracks, Ft. Des Moines  
1928



**Fixing the Coaster, Riverview Park**

May 1931

Maintenance crew 'way' up on top,  
working on roller coaster



Insurance Agents Day  
at Riverview Park  
Sept. 1935  
Riding the miniature  
train





**Shell Oil Company  
station**  
27<sup>th</sup> & Grand Avenue.  
Decorated for  
Christmas, December,  
1936.



**Riverview Park, May, 1936**  
Miniature train and lagoon

**Playing in the shade**

August 1936

Children playing at  
Riverview Park playground



Callanan Junior High  
January 1937  
Flooding the athletic  
field in preparation for  
ice skating





**Street widening triggers tree removal, Feb. 24, 1937**  
View on Sixth Avenue shows trees de-limbed for removal



**Riverview Picnic, August 1937**  
Members of the Des Moines Cooperative Dairy Marketing Association lined up to enter Riverview Park for their annual picnic

**43<sup>rd</sup> and Crocker Streets**

Oct. 7, 1937

A man died after falling from an automobile running board at this location





Grandview  
Golf Course

1937

July 30, 1937  
View looking south on E. 29<sup>th</sup> St. from Arthur Ave.

**Comparing trees, 1937 vs. 2017**  
80 years apart, and likely some trees have departed and new trees have been planted



2017

E 29th St





**Ice Skating on the Lake**  
Witmer Park  
Nov 1938



**Crack the Whip**  
Ice skaters playing  
'crack the whip'  
on the lake at Witmer  
Park  
Dec. 1943

Motorbike Speedway  
Riverview Park, June  
1939





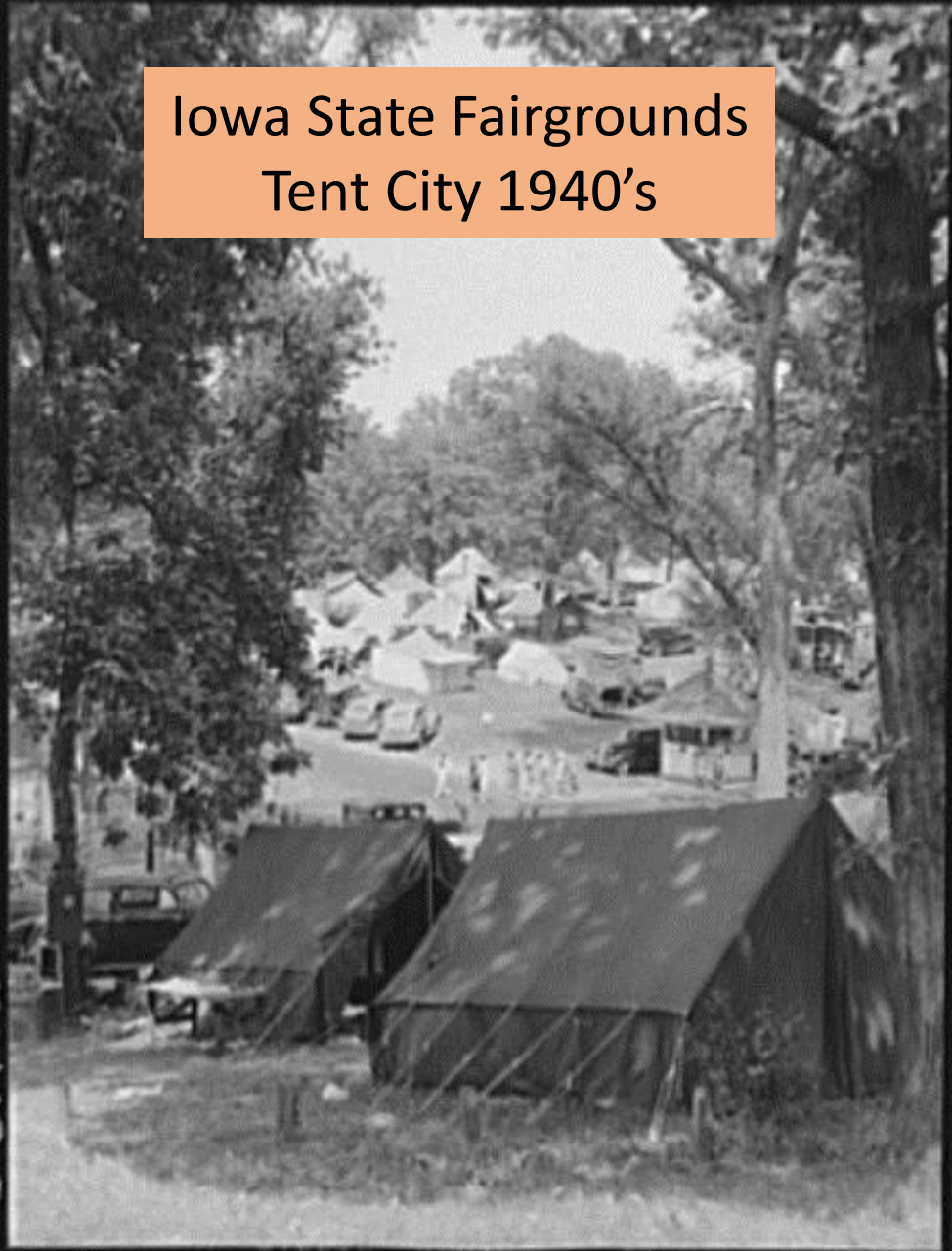
Ice Skating at MacRae Park  
Dec 1939



Interstate Transit Lines,  
1939

This new building  
under construction was  
meant to house both  
passengers and  
officials.

Iowa State Fairgrounds  
Tent City 1940's



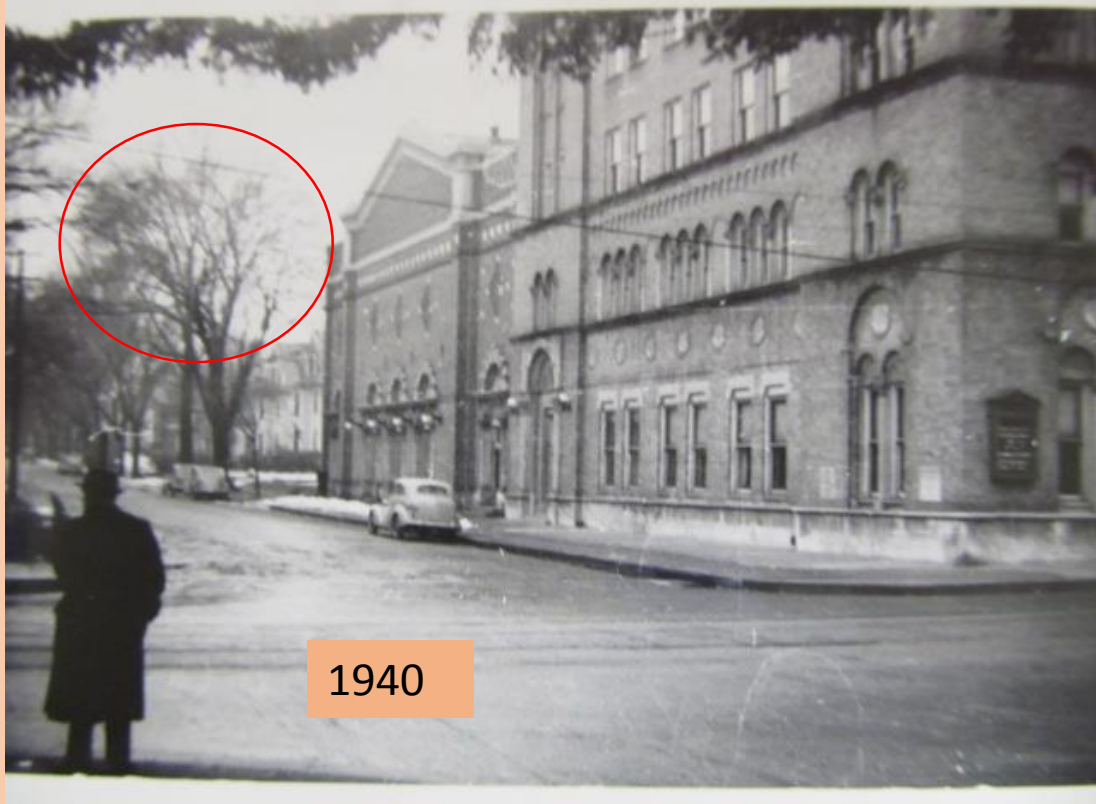
Trees made camping more enjoyable, and trees made Grand Ave. at the fairground more walkable on sunny days

Centennial  
Celebration 1954



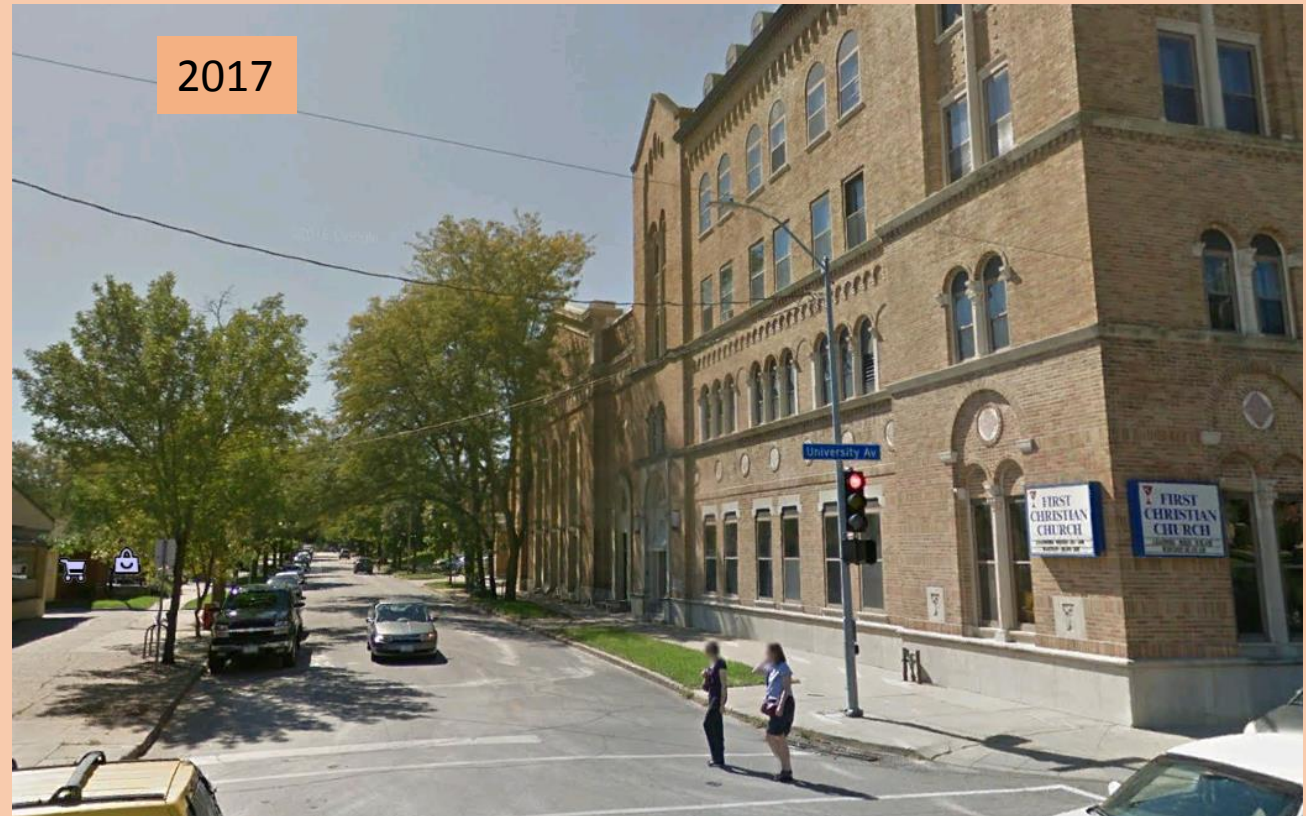
A modern photo of the State Fairgrounds. There are lots of ash trees on the entire fairground, including the campground.





Then and now, Drake Neighborhood Trees were as evident in 1940 as they are now. One likely difference is that in 1940, the high vase-shaped tree to the left of the building was likely an elm tree. They have all but vanished due to Dutch elm disease.

Location: looking south on 25<sup>th</sup> from University Ave.





Riverview Park  
June 1940  
KSO-KRNT picnic  
participants wait to  
board the railroad  
ride



May, 1940  
Riverview Park  
Guessing weight





**Riverview Coaster**, 1940's. Early in the history of the park, a Jack Rabbit Coaster with a double dip section made riders feel like they were coming off the track. However, after a few years it burned down, and the replacement had eight full dips, all going to the ground. Truly a main attraction for park goers.

Riverview Park  
**Go Cart Speedway**  
June 1940  
Patrons take their turn



**Skating on the Lagoon**  
Union Park  
Jan. 1941





April 1941  
Custodian Bill Hammett  
inspecting new elm tree  
on courthouse lawn  
5<sup>th</sup> and Mulberry



Riverview Park on **'The Chute'**

June 5, 1941

These young school crossing  
guards were rewarded with a  
picnic at Riverview Park

Register and Tribune Library



September 1941: WPA workers and streetcar company paving over tracks on Ingersoll east of Harding



September 1941: streetcar derailed along Ingersoll Ave @ 53<sup>rd</sup> St (Country Club Blvd intersection)



## Skating on the Street

Sept. 1941

Children waiting to roller skate on the street, next to Westminster United Presbyterian Church on Allison Ave.





May 25, 1942.

Six year old Eddie Bliquez, wearing a soldier suit, went to Burke Park to hear the band. The monument and the Gold Star Memorial Service served to explain to Eddie and the world, that WWI military personnel made sacrifices. (Register and Tribune Library)



**Shanty at 13<sup>th</sup> and University**

October 1942

Possibly a temporary residence  
for Works Progress

Administration (WPA) workers  
engaged in University Ave. storm  
sewer

The top of the building is charred  
by fire



October 1942: traffic moving up Keosauqua Way approaching University Ave



November 1943: boarding train at Rock Island Station



## **Greenwood Lagoon**

Jan. 1944

Workers shovel snow from lagoon to prepare the surface for ice skating



**Riverview Park, June, 1944**  
Young boy entering ride.  
This was shortly after cleanup  
and redecoration following a  
flood



## **Capital Auto Parts**

July 16, 1944

Forest Ave. at Illinois St.  
No new cars came into  
the yard since 1941

Trees in background  
likely border the Des  
Moines River



**Getting up Steam at Riverview Park  
May 18, 1946**

Engineers prepare the 'highball  
express' for duty, as passengers  
patiently stand by.

Register and Tribune Library





Ice Skating at  
Birdland Park  
January 1946



**Des Moines Art Center**, 4700 Grand Ave. Opened to the public in 1948, with a second wing added in 1968, and a third in 1985. In this photo, there were no trees in the interior courtyard.

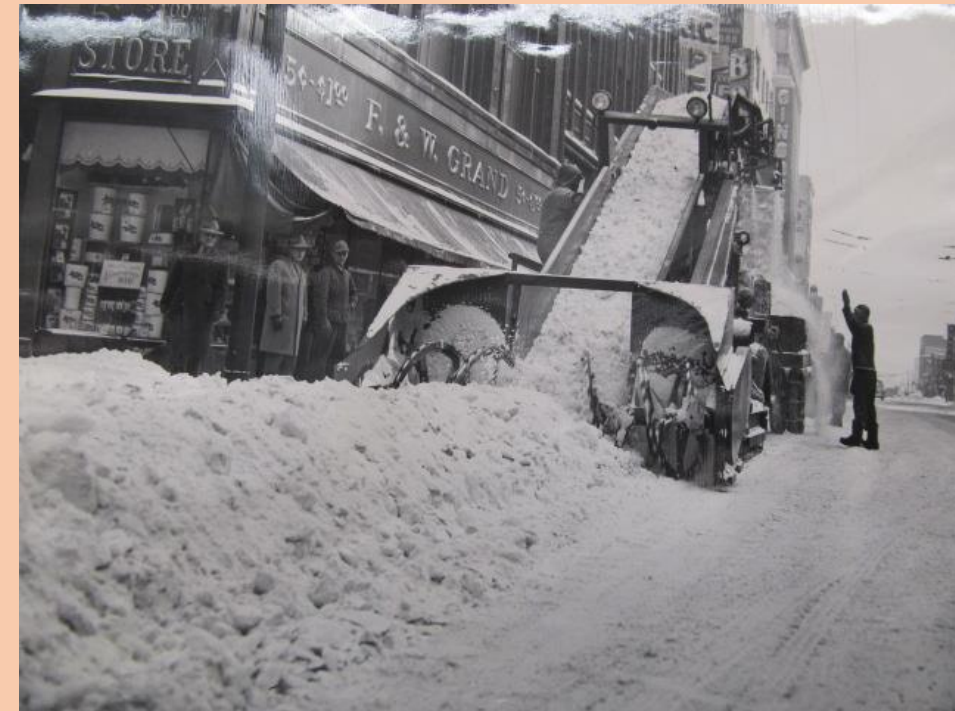
Now, in 2017, the ash trees are threatened by EAB





Snow loader downtown  
January 28, 1949

A power scraper loads snow onto trucks. The snow operation involved about 215 city employees





Likely 1947: aerial view showing floodwaters off Grand/Fleur intersection

Asphalting 9<sup>th</sup> St  
Nov. 4, 1947  
Between Clark & Cottage Streets





**Asphalt Work on Cottage Grove**  
November 1948  
Road improvements at 24<sup>th</sup> St  
and Cottage Grove Ave.  
View includes a glance down  
Kingman Blvd



# What do we learn from this short history (1911-1940's)?

- Riverview Park was a 'really big deal'. Not only was it full of fun activities, but trees made the environs so much more enjoyable
- Downtown trees were almost non-existent, but residential areas continued to grow and appreciate a tree canopy
- Street building and development were responsible for lots of tree losses, not unlike today