Birmingham Historical Society

Linn Park History Hunt

The 20th Street Park & Governmental Center
The Park on 20th Street

Birmingham's founders planned a single park.

The first city plan shows the park as an open green space a block and a half long. Central Park sits at the head of 20th Street, the city's spine, leading from Red Mountain across Southside, the railroad tracks, and the future business district.

City fathers hoped Birmingham would become the state capital. Henry Wellege of Milwaukee published a drawing showing the park with an open, elevated space surrounded by houses and virgin trees. Note the young trees recently planted along the park's edges and the building intended to house our state government.
In 1900, parks were considered pleasure grounds and splices of the country within the city. The photograph above shows a gentleman posing in front of the iron fountain at the center of the park. Benches offer park visitors views of the surrounding houses and trees. The trees have grown in the 15 years since the Henry Wellege view.

Nearly 20 years later, the park has a new name, that of Woodrow Wilson, the United States President who led the nation through World War I. Well-traveled dirt paths indicate lots of park users, especially neighborhood children, playing with hoops. Trees provide shade.
In the early 20th century, every city worth its salt built a civic center, a monumental space surrounded by fine public buildings in the classical style. Shortly after World War I, public-spirited Birmingham citizens hoped to create such a City Beautiful amenity here. Their plan locates new civic buildings and honors military heroes.

In the 1919 plan, the park becomes an open plaza terminating the 20th Street axis with an impressive memorial: a 250-foot tall Tower of Progress. This obelisk, as high as a 25-story building, honors the sacrifices of American veterans.

Flanking the proposed tower are new city hall and county courthouse buildings. Other major public and private buildings surround the park, which is extended a block further south to Sixth Avenue.

The Place to Honor Heroes

Find the heroes by drawing lines to link the monument to the persons remembered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monument</th>
<th>People It Remembers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flame</td>
<td>Confederate soldiers and sailors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obelisk</td>
<td>George Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Revolutionary War patriots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seated lady</td>
<td>Spanish American War soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier holding musket</td>
<td>World War I soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldier with an arm raised</td>
<td>Teacher Mary Cahalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statue</td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson (for whom our county is named)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Veterans of all wars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identify the civic buildings by placing their numbers ▼ in the location (〇) on the map above.


How long did it take to complete Birmingham’s Civic Center? From 1919 to 19______ or ____ years.

Compare what was built with what was planned in the 1919 drawing.

What was built as planned? ________________________________
Great Civic Space and Outdoor Living Room

Construction in the 1930s provided formal paths, pools and a new central axis. An ornamental pool marks the center of the park and the intersection of two major walkways that divide the park into four sections. Reflecting pools extend from the center, visually linking city hall and the courthouse.

Park Features and Furnishings

NATURAL
- botanical gardens
- trees:  __ oak
- lawns
- hickory
- lines of trees:  __ poplar
- rose gardens
- zoological gardens
- special plantings

MAN-MADE
- axis linking city hall and the courthouse
- baseball diamond
- basketball court
- benches
- broad steps
- dirt bike trails
- fountain
- gazebo
- golf links
- hiking trails
- monuments
- paths
- pools
- roads
- runnel or cascade of water
- service building
- sidewalks
- statues
- swimming pools
- swings and slides
- tables and chairs
- trash receptacles
- walls of ________
- orderly
- haphazard

Check uses you observe.
- playing ball
- playing cards
- eating
- sitting
- reading
- relaxing
- history hunting
- skateboarding
- hanging out
- sleeping
- jogging
- sunbathing
- listening to music
- talking
- picnicking
- wading
- playing
- walking

What are most people doing?

What uses are prohibited?

Renovations in the 1980s made the park a lively and welcoming space. A new fountain shoots forth at the center. Pavements are patterned. Benches, tables and chairs encourage nearby office workers to take a break in the park.
1. Indian 10,000 B.C.
Native Americans called the future state of Alabama home. These hunter-gatherers later grew corn but did not live in tepees.

2. Spanish 1540
Hernando de Soto claimed Alabama for Spain and the Catholic Church.

3. French 1682
French explorer Robert de LaSalle traveled down the Mississippi River and claimed its watershed for France. The fleur-de-lis symbolizes France.

4. English 1763
The Treaty of Paris ceded Florida and Louisiana to the English King George III. 1802
England also claimed Alabama as part of the English-governed state of Georgia.

5. Coming of the White Man 1814
After the Creek Indian War, white and African American pioneers began settling Jefferson County. Most came in wagons from the Eastern seaboard and its ports.

6. American 1819
Alabama became a state of the United States of America, shown here by the coat of arms of the 13 American colonies and the scales of justice.

7. Confederate 1861-1865
Alabama joined the Confederate States of America, with Montgomery serving as the first Confederate capital.
Outside the Courthouse

These panels show how citizens breaking the law will be treated.

With “Justice”

With “Mercy”

Patriotic themes — especially our national bird, the eagle — provide other courthouse ornament.

Searching the outside of the courthouse, how many eagles can you find?

5  Keep going.
7  You’ve found a lot, but there are more.
9  You’re getting closer.
35  You’re just guessing.

Did you find several blind owls?

When the courthouse was built, people thought that Alabama was a Muskogee Indian word meaning “Here we rest.” Scholars now think Alabama is the Choctaw word for “thicket clearers,” those who clear the land of dense brush before the raising of crops can begin.
Inside the Courthouse

The courthouse contains courtrooms and offices for services such as driver’s and marriage licenses, and for county officials and agencies. These murals in the entrance lobby tell stories of the Old and New South.

The Old South

The economy of the Old South is based on the cultivation of land.

Looking from bottom to top, find the field hands picking cotton and cutting cane which steamboats transport to markets in the north and Europe, thereby providing a luxurious lifestyle for the enormous feminine figure. Find the slave cottages and the cotton warehouse on the docks, left, and a master's white-columned main house, right.

- cane cutters
- cotton pickers
- slave cottages
- masters at play
- cotton warehouse
- docks with steamboat
- plantation main house

Who works? __________ Who plays? __________

The New South

The economy of the New South is based on industrial production.

Looking from bottom to top, on the left, find the furnace workers. They are “rodding the hole,” forcing a rod into the fiery furnace to insure that the 3,500 degree iron can freely exit the furnace. Right, a coal miner shovels coal in a low coal seam. Above, a dock worker loads cotton bales. Trains take goods to market. Electric service extends across much of the state. A business man unfurls plans for future growth. In 1929, Birmingham was the world's largest producer of iron and the South's largest industrial workplace.

- furnace & stoves
- furnace workers
- coal miner
- dock worker
- steam locomotive
- electric towers
Creators of Birmingham’s civic center hoped that all buildings surrounding the park would be of the classical style, i.e. inspired of Greek and Roman architecture. The library follows that vision.

This Greek temple provides a model for the original Birmingham library.

The Boston Public Library also inspired major American libraries built in the early 20th century.

The first Birmingham Public Library, now Linn-Henley Library

The ancient Greeks and Romans used similar details to ornament their public buildings. A sculptor carved them from blocks of stone.

An inscription (on the Park Place side of the library) states the library’s role. What is it?
The Reading Room

The main reading room houses materials relating to Southern history and literature. It’s where you go to find your ancestors and study your family roots. You can also find these scenes from world literature.

At the fountain of inspiration are Pegasus, a great winged horse, and the poet who captured him with a magic bridle. Pegasus later flew to heaven and became a constellation._________________

A poet and philosopher plucks a petal from a rose tree. He likens his writings to petals saved for his friends from the gardens of his meditations. ___________________

This ancient wise man appears seated on a dragon. He traveled among the people teaching his ideas of loyalty, righteousness, and humility. ___________________

Isis, Goddess of Love and Justice, presents a figure of Truth to her godson Rameses II, who later became a great ruler. His courage in battle inspired one of the first epic poems. ___________________

**Nationalities possible: Chinese, Egyptian, Persian, Roman**

New York artist Ezra Winter painted these scenes years ago. They look brilliant and fresh because they were recently cleaned. Conservators dipped cotton swabs in petroleum distillate and removed years of accumulated dirt, then covered the murals with a clear varnish.

**Find these heroes.**
- Goldilocks and the Three Bears
- Jack and the Beanstalk
- Cinderella

**Murals in the Entrance Hall depict fairy tale hero and heroines.**
Linn Park

The earliest city plan (1871) included a central park at the head of the main street, 20th Street. In the years since then, the nature of this space had changed dramatically, as the surrounding city grew and changed.

People once lived near the park. Children played here daily. Today the formal space enhances large, orderly public buildings and provides a site for city-wide recreation as well as festivals.

Starting Points:
Birmingham City Hall, 710 20th St. North. Telephone for hours & tours, Mayor’s Office: 254-2283; city council meetings open to the public, Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m.
Jefferson County Courthouse, 716 21st St. North (Richard Arrington, Jr. Blvd. N.). Open weekdays; county commission meetings open to the public, Tuesdays except the 2nd Tuesday every other month, 10:00 a.m.

Hike Area: The park and surrounding civic buildings: city hall, county courthouse, library, museum of art, auditorium and school board offices. Great sites for picnics.

Needed to begin: pencils, quarters for parking meters or fees, tour arrangements at individual sites, curiosity, and at least one hour, not including interior tours.

Vocabulary:
Park: from the medieval English and French words meaning enclosure; as in a piece of land in or near a city kept for ornament or recreation.
Recreation: refreshment of strength or health after work; to recreate is to create anew, refresh, restore.
Civic: of or relating to a citizen or to civic affairs.