

MOUNT TABOR

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Special Supplement Timeline of Mt Tabor Park

A timeline of some significant events in the life and times of Mt. Tabor Park

By Cascade Anderson Geller, Diane Redd, & Shannon Loch

- 1888** Buell and Helen Lamberson dedicated a tract of land to the city as designated "park." This land appears to correspond to the site of Reservoir 1. There were about 142 residences in the rural area known as Mt. Tabor.
- 1889** Rail service came to Mt. Tabor and residences increase to 200. Portland's population exceeded 18,000 residents.
- 1892** President Benjamin Harrison signed federal protection for the 200-square-mile Bull Run Reserve situated west of Mt. Hood 50 miles east of the city, the identified site of Portland's municipal water source. This heralded the end of private companies tapping numerous sources, such as a spring at what is now SE 58th Ave. at Hawthorne Blvd. and the Willamette River. Many urban parks, like Mt. Tabor, were developed around reservoir complexes as the City Beautiful movement promoted access to water views.
- 1894** The Burnside Bridge was opened. Reservoirs 1 and 2 at Mt. Tabor, and Reservoirs 3 and 4, in City Park (Washington Park) were built in accordance to City Beautiful engineering and design concepts that encouraged "beautility." Using gravity flow to bring water from the Bull Run, the innovative system used two techniques of concrete construction, newly patented—reinforcing and bush hammering, which gave the appearance of cut stone. The wrought iron fences were designed by Whidden and Lewis, who also designed City Hall, which was completed the next year.
- 1899** Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. wrote *The Relation of Reservoirs to Parks*.
- 1903** John C. Olmsted (1852–1920), in his 1903 report to the Park Board, recommended that the city acquire "considerable land on this prominent and beautiful hill" known as Mt. Tabor. He also recommended that the city hire Emanuel Tillman Mische (c.1879–1934), a long-time designer with the Olmsted firm, as park superintendent. The most esteemed name in landscape design, the Olmsted firms helped to create the field of landscape architecture in the U.S.A. and designed many famous public and private landscapes including the Capitol grounds, Central Park, Arnold Arboretum, Yosemite, Stanford University, and many others.
- 1905** With the Lewis and Clark World Exposition, Portland's population burgeoned and the Mt. Tabor area was annexed to the City of Portland.
- 1906** E. T. Mische is hired as park superintendent. His pedigree included training at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Mt. Tabor was a number one priority as the city's biggest park. Citizen "push clubs" pressured City Council for park development on the east side. Mische developed a propagation nursery and fruitectium on the south side of Mt. Tabor.
- 1907** A second Olmsted report to the Park Board encouraged the city to procure lands for parks, something that had yet to occur even after the 1903 report.
- 1908** The Oregonian's ran a big article headlined "Want Park at Mt. Tabor: East sides think ground should be bought now. Committee to appear before park commission today, setting forth wishes of United Push Clubs." Citizen push clubs had a design in hand that included no less than 169 acres. Oregonian owner Henry Pittock (1835–1919) owned sizeable acreage on the butte, exactly where the new reservoirs were to be sited. He was paid some of the highest amounts for their properties when acquisitions began.



1909: Reservoir 2



Emanuel Tillman Mische



1909: brush clearing, Reservoir 5



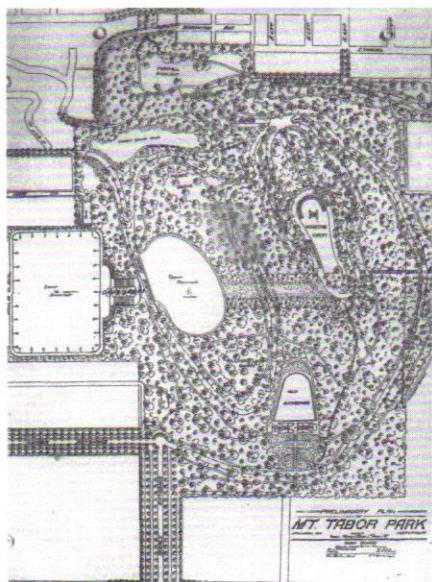
1909: Reservoir 6 under construction. Note Reservoir 2 in left background



c. 1910: Reservoir 5



c. 1910: Reservoir 5 looking west



1913: Mische's plan for Mt. Tabor Park, as published in the Oregonian

- 1909 More than 40 private properties, at a cost of \$426,000, were procured, including the land where Reservoirs 5 and 6 were constructed. Some people deeded their land to the city for nominal amounts, \$1 or \$10, with the stipulation that it was only to be used as a public park. Pittock sold his land for more than \$60,000. A goal was to control "views in the four directions." Charles Paul Keyser was hired as Mische's principal assistant. The acquisition of parkland in Portland coincided directly with President Teddy Roosevelt's campaign and policies for conservation that helped implement the National Parks Service and the U.S. Forest Service.
- 1910 Despite citizen's protests over changing the historic name, dating back to at least 1854, City Council passed an ordinance (#21070) "providing that the public park on Mount Tabor shall be known and designated as Williams Park" (April 28, 1910) honoring George Henry Williams (1823–1910), a lawyer, judge, and senator from Oregon.
- 1911 A large article, with Mische's design and a map of the park, ran in the May 21 Sunday Oregonian. An ordinance, dated February 1911, was drafted and apparently never signed: "providing for the change of name of the public park located on Mount Tabor...hereby changed from Williams Park to Mount Tabor Park."
- 1912 902,000 automobiles were registered in the U.S.A. and approximately 6,000 in Portland. The park's design blended pedestrian access with the new age of automobile recreation. Discussions about access to the park included the recommendation of a large boulevard leading from the river to the park. Mische was busy in the nursery and reported, "There are trees now growing in the Mt. Tabor Nursery to supply a quantity sufficient to extend planting by about 30–40 miles in the fall of 1913." Mische pushed to get the flat land at the southern base of the butte, not used by the Water Bureau, to address the new trend of active recreation and physical fitness and designed a community recreation center including a swimming pool, a wading pool, gymnasiums, playfields, and a formal landscaped area with a pergola. (The Parks Bureau revisited Mische's design 60 years later when Reservoir 2's water was deemed unnecessary and it was taken off line. See 1996.) Women gained the right to vote in Oregon (see 1933). Simon Benson, preferring Bull Run water to whiskey, donated the funds to install 20 bronze drinking fountains, still in service in the city.
- 1913 Mische received a gift from a noted plant collector of 500 species from China that were planted out in the nursery. Stock was also obtained from the Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C. Mische ordered a shipment of young sequoia trees from California, and some of these, like the large one above Reservoir 6, probably grace neighborhoods across the city. The large Smith residence at the summit was converted to public use. The north side concrete water tank was constructed to supply water for the restrooms. Popular concerts were held in July and August. Development continued on the curvilinear drives that led to the "discovery" of the cinder cone. A mini-Gold Rush was started when a park employee "salted" the cinders with gold dust but the treasure was the clinkers and cinders that were abundantly used in and out of the park until the Geological Society of Oregon eventually protested further excavation.
- 1914 The east side concrete stairs to the summit were completed. Sixty percent of Portland's population lived on the east side of the Willamette River. Mische stepped down as park superintendent after becoming frustrated with the politics and fickle funding, like the senior Olmsted. Like the Olmsteds he became a consultant, going on to complete the design and implementation of Laurelhurst Park, which won the most beautiful park in the west award from the Pacific Coast Parks Association. Mische continued to be active in Portland's conservation efforts and served as the seventh president of the City Club of Portland.
- 1917 Charles Paul Keyser, assistant to E.T. Mische, became Portland's park supervisor, a position he held until his retirement in 1949. Keyser implemented Mische's design of Mt. Tabor, and other parks, to the best of his ability and resources. A park caretaker lived at the summit of the butte.
- c1918 The Horticultural Services Building, in the maintenance yard, was constructed with a coal-burning boiler for heating the greenhouses.

- 1920 The caretaker house, built within the park boundaries at the Salmon Street entrance, was completed for approximately \$3,000. This house is now rented out.
- 1920s The 88 concrete lampposts lining the original roads and pathways and serviced by underground wires were installed. Following Mische's original design, power for the lighting, pumps, and any other needed electricity was to be generated from the fall of water between Reservoir 5 and 6. The reservoirs continue to supply electricity to this day. The earthen-dam face between Reservoirs 5 and 6 is, therefore, regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The tennis courts and four comfort stations were built during this period.
- c.1930s Mt. Tabor Park was used for trail rides. There was a horse stable for renting horses off NE Glisan St.
- 1932 Relief workers installed hard surfaces on drives in the park.
- 1933 A statue of Harvey Scott (1838–1910), the first editor of the *Oregonian* and a staunch opponent of public high schools, was placed at the summit with pomp and circumstance that included a dedication attended by over 3,000 people. The sculptor, Gutson Borglum, did the Scott statue to supplement finances while at work on the famous Mt. Rushmore monument. Scott's statue was a gift from his family and came with a \$5,000 trust for perpetual maintenance. (Scott's sister, Abigail Scott Duniway (1834–1915), published a rival weekly progressive newspaper that was extremely instrumental in gaining women's right to vote in Oregon in 1912, as well as passing the Married Women's Property Act giving women the right to own property. She was the first woman to register to vote in Multnomah County.)
- 1934 Although the Civil Works Administration funds and workers were not to be used for maintenance projects, they were tapped to provide much-needed drainage work in the park, amphitheater, and stage.
- 1937 The SE Harrison Street entrance drive was constructed by Works Progress Administration funds.
- 1938 The art deco-designed park administrative building, along with numerous other buildings, were added to the older structures already existing in the maintenance yard along SE Division St.
- 1941 The park was closed to protect the water reservoirs after the Pearl Harbor attack.
- 1941 The park reopened with barbed wire fencing around the reservoirs.
- c.1940s–50s The soap box derby track was built sometime in this time period and refurbished in 1957 with complaints about inaccurate specifications.
- 1947 Mt. Tabor Park moved from its standing as the city's first to the second largest park when Forest Park was finally created after development plans dating back to 1918 were thwarted by weather and other conditions. Mt. Tabor Park was listed as having between 175 and 200 acres.
- 1952 The geological marker was installed at crater.
- 1954 A park map showed a ski-tow rope on the hill southeast of Reservoir 5.
- 1960s–70s The radio tower (135 ft. tall) at the summit (elevation 643 ft.) was installed and the comfort station converted to water bureau use. The picnic shelter was constructed near the crater. The road to the summit was closed to motor vehicles. Park hours were diminished in reaction to young people's activities in the park.
- 1995 Dog off-leash area trials were started in Mt. Tabor Park and Gabriel Park in the southwest.
- 1990 Reservoir 2, on Division and SE 60th Avenue, was sold to a private developer. The gatehouse was sold as a separate tax lot as a personal dwelling and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A Historic Architectural and Engineering Report was completed.



1934: Civil Works Administration (CWA) crew



1934: CWA crew builds the crater stage



1935: WPA crew, possible brush clearing



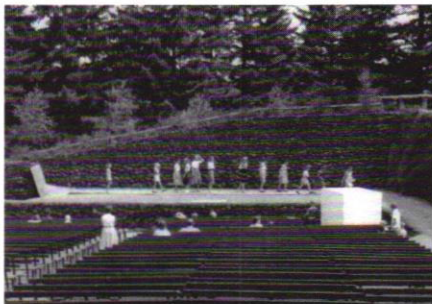
1935: WPA crew clearing brush



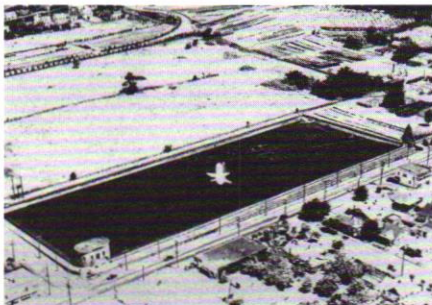
1935: WPA crew clearing slide, Reservoir 1



1939: original park shops building



1953: amphitheater



1920: Reservoir 2, with extensive plantings



1921: yard and greenhouse



2003: Hands Around the Reservoir event

- 1991 Mt. Tabor was included in the city's East Buttes, Terraces, and Wetlands Conservation Plan. Two views, from the summit looking east and west, as well as the west view from Reservoir 5 across Reservoir 6, were included in the Scenic Resource Protection Plan: Scenic Views, Sites, and Corridors. City Council adopted both plans.
- 1997 Mt. Tabor was included in the Boring Lava Domes Supplement to the Johnson Creek Basin Plan adopted by City Council.
- 1998 Mt. Tabor master planning process, involving many citizens, was undertaken.
- 1999 The playground near the picnic shelter was remodeled and bricks were sold for \$50 each and stamped with the names of the benefactors.
- 2000 The Mt. Tabor Master Plan was published, but not ordained by City Council. The group Friends of Mt. Tabor Park was established to help improve and maintain the park.
- 2002 Friends of the Reservoirs was established in response to the city's plans to bury the reservoirs. The city began the "What goes on top?" campaign.
- 2003 The Friends of the Reservoirs sponsored a Hands Around the Reservoirs event that drew more than 1,500 people to encircle Reservoir 6.
- 2004 Neighborhood volunteers, with support of the MTNA, are successful in getting Reservoirs 1, 5, and 6, and later the entire park in a separate nomination, listed in the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places. These same volunteers completed the nomination for Reservoirs 3 and 4 in Washington Park. Eight of the 13 members of the city's Independent Review Panel vote to oppose burial of the reservoirs.
- 2005 A Good Neighbor Agreement was developed and an off-leash area was established at its current location on the southern boundary of the park.
- 2006 The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Long Term 2 Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule (LT2) was released, creating another threat to the reservoirs. Members of the MTNA and others stopped the sale of the maintenance yard and nursery to Warner Pacific College. This led to a two-year process, including formal mediation and a planning committee, to design a reconstruct of the maintenance yard referred to as a master plan update.
- 2009 Friends of Mt. Tabor Park hosted a well-attended centennial celebration for the park. MTNA and other neighborhood associations hosted a meeting attended by over 200 people, including city and D.C. representatives, to push for a LT2 waiver that would keep the reservoirs from being buried.

Here are some links to information about Mt. Tabor Park:

Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association history link:
<http://www.mttaborpdx.org/>

Portland Parks and Recreation history timeline:
<http://www.portlandonline.com/parks/index.cfm?c=39473>

Friends of Mt. Tabor Park:
www.taborfriends.com

Friends of the Reservoirs:
<http://friendsofreservoirs.org/>

Wikipedia Mt. Tabor Park:
[wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Tabor_\(Oregon\)](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Tabor_(Oregon))

Great Public Spaces:
www.pps.org/gps/one?public_place_id=566