

History Hike 3

Walking On Fire & Ice

As you leave the library, look to the right and proceed south on the bike path in the park next to Salt Creek. In one mile, the path will end at Central Road. Let's go, your hiking companion will be Salt Creek as you, and it, meander South. Looking at the park now, you may think it was always this idyllic. You'd be wrong. Proceed to the following coordinates and in a very few moments we'll pick up a story of fire and ice.

42° 04.435 N
088° 01.361 W

If the Defense Department's three billion dollar satellite system is working well today, and it always is, you should now be standing just about on a bridge which spans Salt Creek. Remember, the accuracy is to 15 feet so you may be on or near the bridge – hey, close enough for government work.



Pre-Park District recreation in Rolling Meadows.



This is a good place to stop and contemplate what a challenge Salt Creek was for the early residents of Rolling Meadows. In 1956, there was no Rolling Meadows Park District. Children had two options: play in the back yard or play on the “prairie”. Before you get caught up with thoughts of happy children frolicking among the buffalo, you should know that “prairie” was the name given to the undeveloped, littered land near the creek.¹ It was dangerous and a health hazard that worried parents but attracted lots of kids.²

Residents saw the need but didn't have the funding to pay the legal expenses for formation of a park district. Enter architect, developer, and founder of Rolling Meadows, Kimball Hill and ... well, a lot of dancers?! I believe I already established in History Hike 2 (The Most Famous Bathtub In Rolling Meadows) that our residents were capable of hard work but were equally prone to serious bouts of whimsy.

Money to cover legal expenses incurred by the formation of the district was donated by Kimball Hill and the local “Swing-A-Park” group, which raised over \$1,000 by hosting a dance at Carpenter’s Hall in Des Plaines.³

Soon, residents settled down and turned to more traditional sources of funding: a group of fourth graders from Kimball Hill School donated \$10 raised by holding a pot holder sale.⁴ Oh well, the lawyers didn’t ask where the money came from. To say the Park District started from humble beginnings is an insult to humble beginnings everywhere.

By 1957, the Park District had been born – and faced a lot of undeveloped acreage, remnants of a dumping ground, and fields of weeds.⁵ By 1959, Kimball Hill leased sixty acres on either side of Salt Creek to the Park District for \$1.00 per year – and perhaps a pot holder.⁶ In the following year, probably to avoid becoming awash with pot holders, he donated the land to the Park District free and clear. That same year, the first, admittedly modest, summer day camp was organized. The Rolling Meadows Park District was on its way – and so should we be. But before we continue our stately progress to the South, let’s cast our gaze at the rather large hill to the left of the path.

Doesn’t look like a natural feature of the landscape, does it? I bring this to your attention not because what lies beneath are the ancient ruins of an Aztec pyramid but because it is further evidence of the observation in History Hike 2 that we in Rolling Meadows sometimes do things backwards – but the outcome is usually good and free of serious injuries. Dateline September 30, 1983: Park District officials announced that the sledding hill near the Community Center will be nearly doubled in size because sleds were using the steeper back side of the old hill (the side meant for people to walk up) presumably because it provided a more thrilling ride.⁷ It most certainly provided a more thrilling walk for everyone else. It was hoped that the newly configured hill would get everyone back to the correct side – but just to make the point, Park District Director Rudy Nelson said he hoped to eventually have a guard to “keep users organized”.⁸

Down the path you go! Go South and stop at the following coordinates for a story that is both inspiring and ironic.

42° 04.247 N
088° 01.313W

By July 1962, the Sports Complex across Salt Creek was on its way with the completion of the pool. Swimming was a challenge during the first thirteen days as over 12,000 happy swimmers used the facility creating a bit of an aquatic traffic jam.⁹ The white building with the sloping roof is the ice arena. Other communities have such arenas now, but when it opened in 1970, it was somewhat unique.

By virtue of its modern facilities and “official” size ice arena, the site was frequently used for national competitions and soon became the envy of neighboring towns. The park’s skating program had come a long way from a flooded pond in Kimball Hill Park!¹⁰

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Flooded pond ice rink.



Indoor ice rink in top right corner of this photo.

What began with pot holders and swing dances now provided year-round recreational facilities which were often national finalists for awards given to recreational organizations.¹¹ At least once, however, it did provide a bit of irony. Strange but true, in 1987 the ice rink was closed for ten days due to, I'm not making this up, frozen pipes!¹²



1966

The Park District Sports Complex pool was a popular spot for Rolling Meadows families.

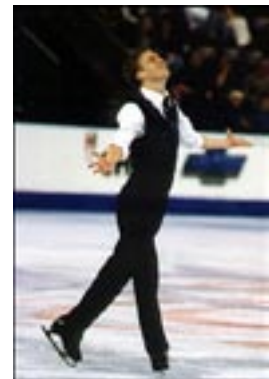
1967



1978

But back to more serious pursuits, if you doubt whether the Rolling Meadows Park District has had an impact on the National and International sports scene, consider the case of Rolling Meadows' Olympic Figure Skating Bronze Medalist, Tim Goebel. Tim began skating at the ice arena but quickly outgrew group lessons. By age eleven, he relocated to Lakewood, Ohio to train year-round with coach (and 1960 Olympic Gold Medalist) Carol Heiss Jenkins.¹³

Timothy earned the nickname "The Quad King" in 1998 when he technically surpassed all American skaters becoming the first to land a quadruple jump in an international competition. He put himself in the history books again in 2000 when he became the first male skater ever to land three quadruple jumps in a competition.¹⁴



Timothy Goebel

So much for the ice, return to the path on the East side of Salt Creek and proceed a very short distance to the following coordinates:

42° 04.235 N
088° 01.281 W

As you stand among the benches and gaze toward the soccer fields to the South, harken back to December of 1958. It was 60 feet wide, 150 feet long, 2,000 years old and it attacked right here – twice! The newly organized Rolling Meadows Fire Department was called to the field you now see before you to battle a peat bog fire that erupted after some school children set fire to a tree stump.¹⁵ Peat bog fires can burn for weeks and a 1937 peat bog fire in Elmhurst burned for more than a month.¹⁶ The Rolling Meadows fire was extinguished but erupted again two weeks later – guess it was a “re – peat”! This time Rolling Meadows Volunteers flooded the whole field, but like Edgar Allen Poe’s *Telltale Heart*, can we be certain that this was the last retreat of the peat? Walk gingerly and continue South along the bike path for a half mile to Central Road and History Hike 4 – also known as Rolling Meadows’ Area 51.

NOTE: You’ll get the most out of History Hike 4 if you do it at the following times:

Sundays 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., April through the second Wednesday in December