



Background

Historians agree the word "Meramec" has Native American origins, but disagree on its definition. Some believe it means "good fishing", others say "river of ugly fishes" or "water of the bitter springs". But while its true definition remains a mystery, the river has certainly been a major influence on the communities along its banks. It was the "highway" to the area's first residents, an abundant source of food, and later, a draw for recreational needs.

Beginning as early as 1912, clubhouses on stilts - to keep them above flood level - were built along the banks of the Meramec River. People from St. Louis and other parts of the metropolitan area either leased or purchased these buildings for recreational purposes. They were a popular attraction in Fenton for more than 60 years. In the late 50's, standing room only bus service from St. Louis ran hourly, from early morning to midnight, bringing people to the Fenton area summer cottages.

Recurrent flooding (the major ones in 1915, 1927, 1937, 1938, 1945, 1982 and 1993) eventually drove out many clubhouse owners. In the 80's and 90's, flood buyout opportunities through FEMA and clubhouse purchases by the City of Fenton made it possible to reclaim the banks of the river and repair the scenic corridor. Once listed as one of the most polluted rivers in the state, collaborative clean-up efforts have been very successful. Today it is one of the most diverse waters in the state.

The City of Fenton prides itself on its park system. With 350 acres of parkland it has more park acreage per capita than any other municipality in the state. In 1986, the city unveiled its new logo, designating itself as the "City of Parks". In the early 1990's, the first Parks and Recreation Director was hired and many park development projects were launched. As the city purchased and removed clubhouses, the beginnings of paved bike paths began to be added to sections of the linear park between Larkin Williams Road and the Meramec River. In 1991 and 1992, this 25-acre linear park was named the Fenton Meramec Greenway and the Boardwalk Pavilion and the Coleman Pavilion were constructed.

FENTON'S MERAMEC GREENWAY

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Recent Trail Developments

In 2002 and 2003 funding requests to the Great Rivers Greenway and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources were granted to add 4730 linear feet to the trail. Total project cost was \$200,000. Project completion was delayed until 2005 while attempts were made to acquire properties. Ultimately, the segment was completed by including a share-the-road section on Riverside Drive, by-passing a 2600-foot gap near our Boardwalk Pavilion.

In this manner, trail users can connect through a series of greenway trails, closed park roads, park trails and share-the-road sections for a lengthy walk/ride from Unger Park to George Winter Park.

Currently bicyclists and pedestrians can begin at the north end of St. Louis County's Unger Park, utilizing the trail within the park. After sharing Yarnell Road for a segment just south of the park, trail users can pick up the Fenton Meramec Greenway Trail just north of I-44. They can continue for 3360 feet along the newly built trail, share-the-road on Riverside Drive and then enter Fenton City Park. The Greenway Trail continues through Fenton City Park, exiting and crossing back to the river side of the road at Henderson Lane and Larkin Williams. Utilizing more trail and Olde Towne Fenton sidewalks, users may ultimately end up at George Winter Park. The total distance between Unger and Winter is four miles. The 1.4 mile loop around Fenton City Park adds a pleasant detour to the trip. Restrooms, drinking fountains and many other park amenities are available in City Park.



Fenton clubhouses destroyed by floods.



Future Plans

Continued efforts are underway to acquire the property or an easement for the missing 2600-foot segment, eliminating the need to share-the-road on Riverside Drive. The City of Fenton also continues its efforts to build connecting trails to its eight other parks. Total trail mileage in the city at this time is 8.1 miles of connecting trails. Paving the central spine trail from Fenton City Park, through the Fabick Nature Preserve to Westside Park is in the Parks Department's master plan and will enable trail users to travel from the Meramec River on the city's eastern boundary to its western boundary at Westside Park.

Trails in the Fenton Meramec Greenway.

