Mount Tabor Park

By Kathy Tucker

Southeast Portland's 196-acre Mount Tabor Park sits on an extinct volcanic butte, one of thirty-two cinder cones in a thirteen-mile radius. The park offers visitors a forest-like setting and panoramic views of the city.

Mount Tabor Park dates to 1894, when the city built two open reservoirs on land acquired for that purpose (two other open reservoirs were built in 1911). After the turn of the twentieth century, Portland's growing east-side population demanded park space, and, in 1903 landscape architect John C. Olmsted recommended the city obtain more land at Mount Tabor. In 1909, the Board of Park Commissioners used voter-approved bonds to buy approximately forty lots on Mount Tabor for $366,000.

Portland Parks Superintendent Emanuel Tillman Mische, who had worked with the Olmsted Brothers' landscape design firm in Massachusetts, consulted with Olmsted on his naturalistic design for the park. The plan included long flights of stairs, gently curving parkways, numerous walking trails, and a nursery yard. It also showcased native plants. Since then, the parks department has added basketball and tennis courts, picnic areas, playgrounds, an amphitheater, and, during the 1950s, a soap-box derby course that is still used for annual races.

In 1990,the city decommissioned a reservoir at Southeast 60th Avenue and Division Street and sold the land for development. In recent years, park neighbors have successfully organized to fight city plans to bury the remaining open water reservoirs and to sell or lease the nursery yard. In 2004, Mount Tabor Park and the reservoirs were added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Sources

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