

# River Remade to Provide Park Playground

## Hundreds of Men Toil 17 Months to Change Nature's Course and Build a Beautiful Recreational Area in Lincoln Park to Match Any in the Land

By Paul Ringler  
Of The Journal Staff

ONE day this week the relentless jaws of a grunting steam shovel will bite into a narrow earthen dike in Lincoln park, on the north edge of the city, and the waters of the Milwaukee river will plunge out of their age old bed into a new channel.

For 17 months, hundreds of men with picks and shovels and wheelbarrows have toiled and sweated to make it possible for that rush of water to leave nature's course and follow a course made by man.

Three-fourths of the job which these men started in June, 1937, is completed. Another six months, possibly another year, and it will be finished.

Theirs is a tremendous project. These men are remaking a river. And they are building for Milwaukeans of today and of generations to come a recreational area that will be one of the finest of its kind in the land.

If you have known Lincoln park in recent years, you will picture the Milwaukee river twisting in a rude reversed S through a swampy area of willow growth; a shabby bathhouse and muddy beach at the eastern extremity of the S, and the golf course, divided by the river.

Vision the Lincoln park of the future. Out of the great loops in the river have been molded four beautiful islands. On the largest one, linked with the mainland by two bridges, is a boat landing, a bath and boat house and a parking area. Off the island is a beach for swimming. Shaded paths circle the island.

On the second island is a game refuge, stocked with game which boaters and canoeists may glimpse as they float past. The other islands will be picturesque wooded spots where boaters and canoeists may picnic or walk.

To the east of the river will be the golf course, much more difficult than the easy one of today; picnic spots and the archery range. In the southwest section, now occupied by part of the golf course, will be fields for baseball and football.

It is a fascinating story of engineering ingenuity.

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For decades no one was inconvenienced by the floods. At times they were actually helpful, for they recovered the lands of truck gardeners with new coatings of rich soil. But for the last 20 years, as Milwaukeeans settled in increasing numbers along the upper river in permanent and summer homes, the floods have been a menace and a nuisance.

Demands that action be taken to halt the floods have grown in recent years. Until five years ago, however, there was no way to finance a flood control program.

Then came the New Deal, federal spending for relief purposes and the CWA. One of the first CWA projects in Milwaukee county was the taking of the first "plug" from the Milwaukee river. CWA and FERA workers blasted and hacked out a limestone ledge that formed the river bottom from the Hampton av. bridge in Lincoln park into Estabrook park. Thousands of tons of solid rock were removed. In places the ledge was seven feet deep. The rock is being crushed and used in roadmaking throughout the parks. A mountain of it still stands next to Port Washington rd. and the North Western tracks in Lincoln park.

Removal of the ledge brought a new problem. Owners of upstream land found their water levels falling. Damage suits were threatened. It was decided to build a dam between the high banks in Estabrook park, a quarter of a mile below the Port

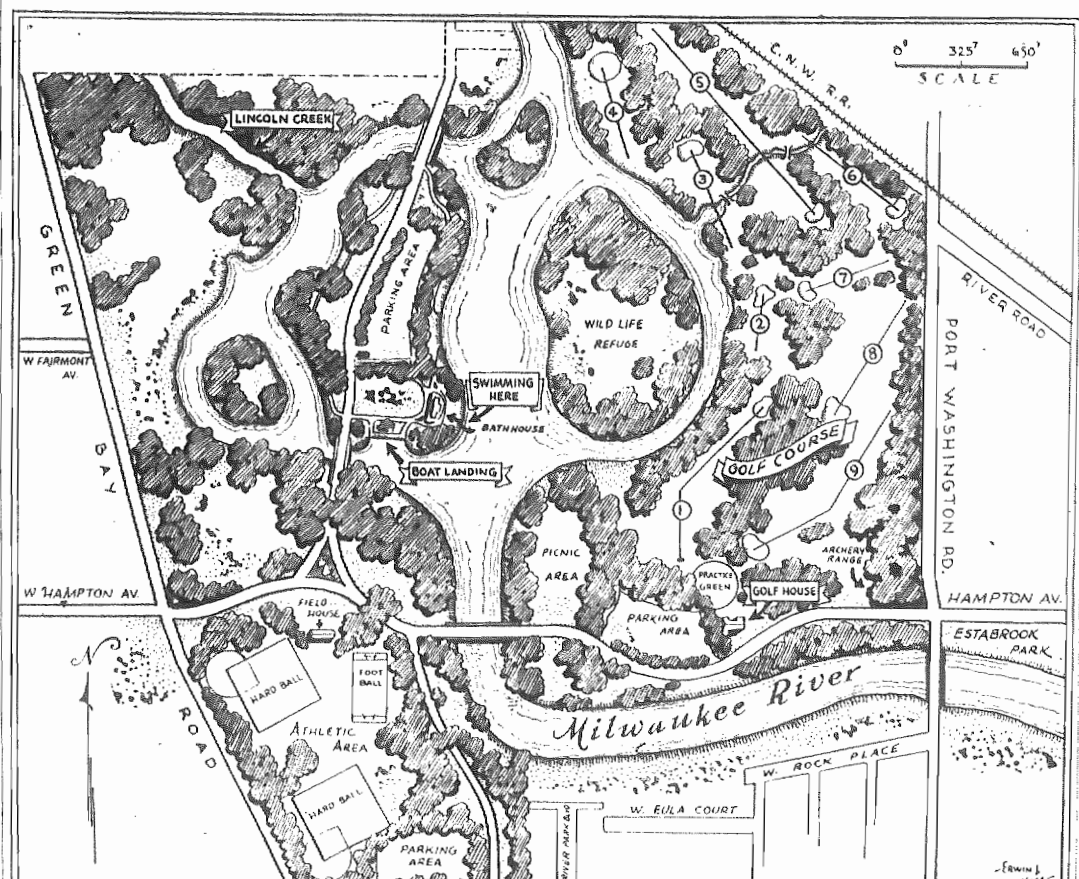
turesque. His idea was tested on models in the hydraulic laboratories at the University of Wisconsin and found feasible. It was put in practice two years ago on a small dam across the Milwaukee river in Kletzsch park.

The Estabrook park main dam will be of this type. Although the width of the channel, from the west bank to the island, is only 250 feet, the total length of the serpentine dam will be 362 feet. And it will look more like a natural falls than a dam.

The base of the structure, the backwall, will be concrete, but the downstream side will be laid with stone. The structure will be seven feet high.

AS THE county's planning department was worrying about the dam in Estabrook park and the water levels upstream, the city park board, which then controlled Lincoln park, worried about the loops in that park—the loops that blocked the passage of ice each spring, thus causing the annual floods.

In October, 1936, the board, thinking only of flood prevention, proposed a WPA project for the elimination of the loops. It asked that a 200 foot channel be dug straight



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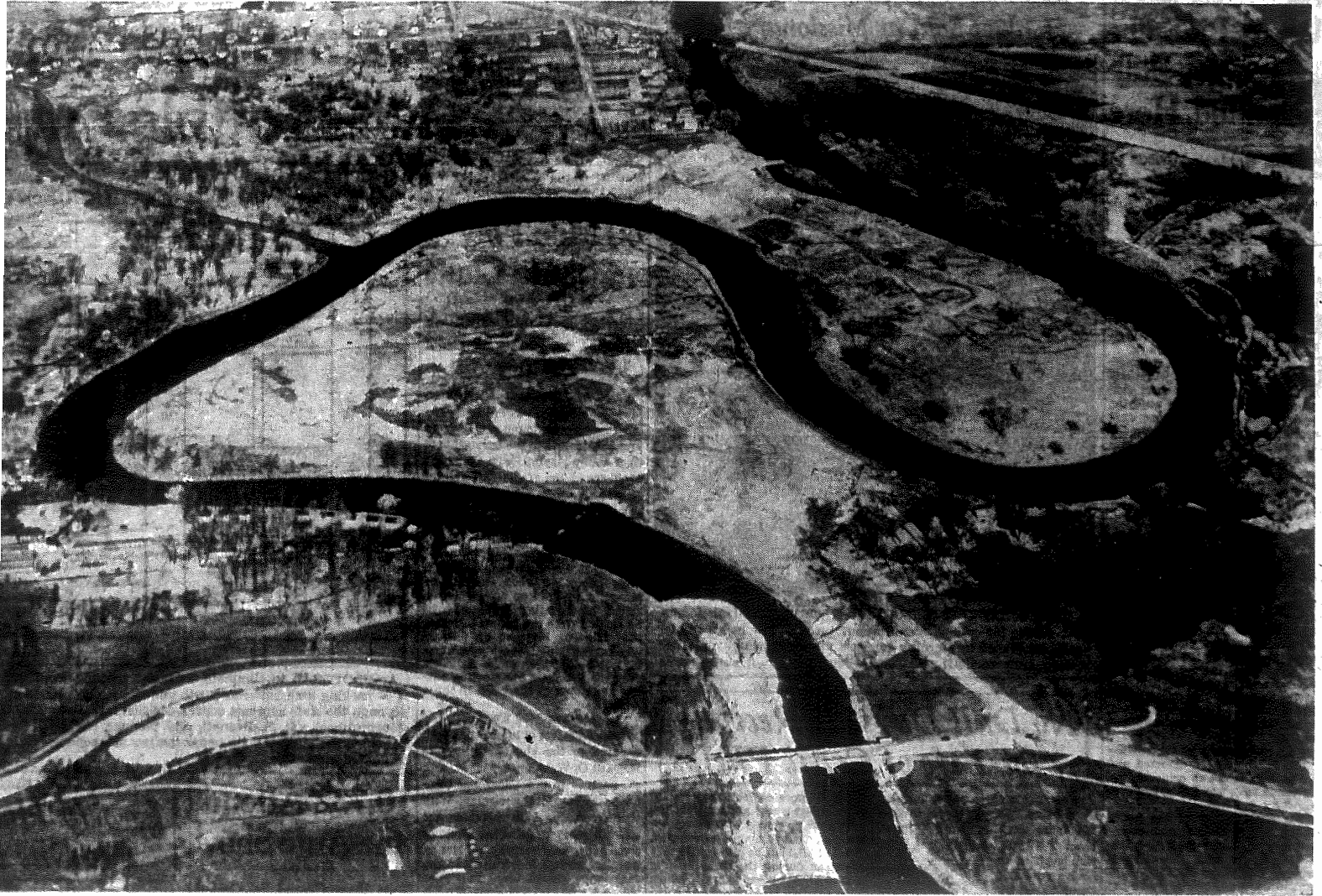
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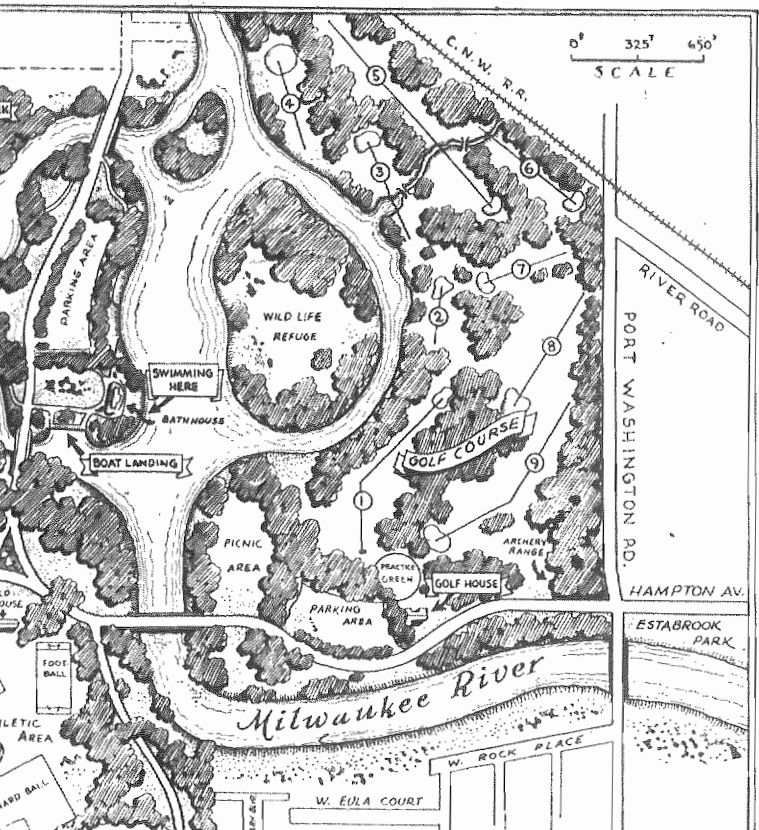
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# To Provide Park Playground for Milwaukee



—Journal Staff Photo From Lange Aviation Plane



The air view above shows the Milwaukee river as it twists through Lincoln park today. The map to the left shows the Lincoln park of the future, with the river remade. Looking closely at the upper picture, one can see faintly the gigantic cuts that W.P.A. workers are digging through the narrow sections of the two loops. Out of this torn earth, nothing but a waste lowland of willow growth since the white man came to Milwaukee, will come a great water playground for Milwaukee. The road at the bottom of the air view is Hampton av. Across the upper right hand corner of the picture cut the North Western road tracks, and a bit of Port Washington road in the extreme corner. The stream emptying into the loop at the left is Lincoln creek, long known as Mud creek. The white area in the river under the Hampton av. bridge marks an area in which W.P.A. workers are deepening the river channel.

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As Milwaukee grew, industry moved out along the rivers, the best means of transportation. First came sawmills, then flour mills. Eventually, on the river at the south end of what is now Lincoln park, Lindwurm built a distillery. His barrels of whisky floated in warehouses at the mouth of the river.

In the seventies the railroad (now the North Western) cut through the Lindwurm land, Louis N. Pierron, whose memory of the Milwaukee river goes back 60 years, recalls that the first rails were laid through the low Lindwurm tract on great piles of ties.

Shortly after this, the Lindwurm distillery was torn down and the Lindwurms turned to farming the land that could be farmed. Even that long ago, vegetables from the low lands along the river were drawing the fanciest prices in Milwaukee markets.

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Whitefish Bay resort, on Lake Michigan.

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Little was done in the way of development for years. Picnickers used the park, so did nature lovers; fishermen lolled on the river banks.

Then came golf. A public course at Grant park was popular, a small course at Lake park was more so. The city park board put in links at Lincoln and, because there was not enough high land on the Lindwurm tract, bought the farm of Louis Allder, on the west side of the river. The Lindwurm and Allder tracts make up most of Lincoln park's 250 acres of today.

In 1922, the Electric Co. extended streetcar service to Lincoln park, putting a shelter house where the barns of Joseph Berthelet, founder of the old Milwaukee Cement Co., used to stand. The Berthelet home still stands on the river bank at the north end of Estabrook park. The Lindwurm home, opposite Hampton rd. from the first tee of the Lincoln park golf course, was torn down in the last month.

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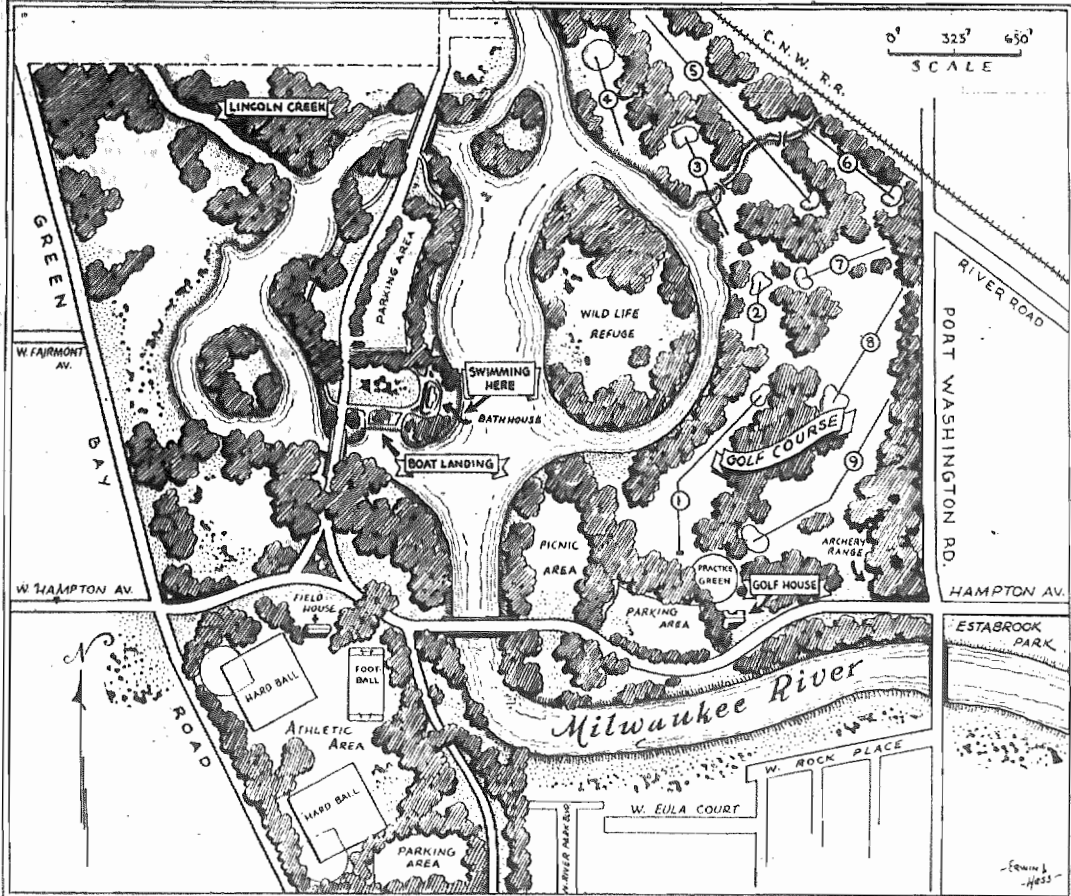
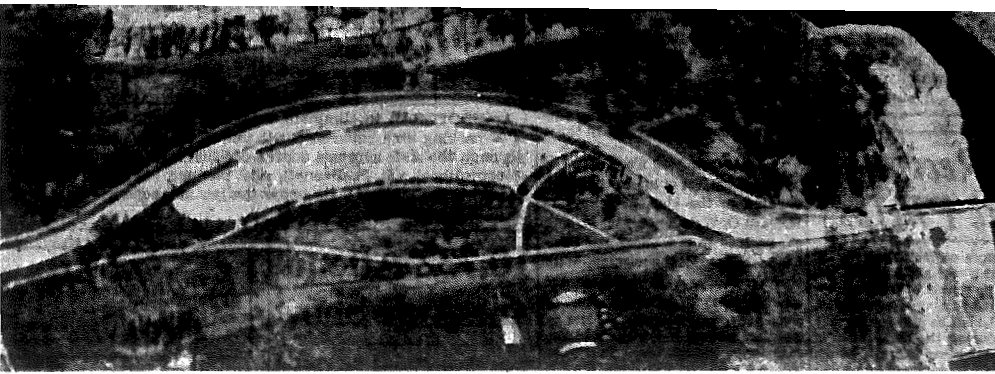
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LONG YEARS AGO, when Simon Juneau was Milwaukee's only business man, Indian trails through the S in the Milwaukee river on their way to trade near in his cabin at the mouth of the river. Indian trails follow the river on either side, carefully wide where the river flows through the loops.

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### Dam of New Type Is Half Completed

The minds of engineers and recreational authorities conceived a different kind of dam. CCC boys, working under the direction of the national park service of the department of interior, now have the dam half completed.

There will be two sections to the dam—the gate section and the dam proper. They will be separated by a small island.

The gate section lies in a great cut made in the east bank of the river. It is so well concealed that casual observers will not notice it. This section is 355 feet long, 37 feet in height, and has gates each 7 feet in height. Winches on the superstructure operate the gates. Around the edge of each gate is a heating element—a precaution to prevent freezing of the gates in winter.

At the upstream end of the channel that leads into the gate section of the dam will be a series of ice guards, concrete structures sticking two feet out of the water to shunt large blocks of ice away from the gates.

This section of the dam is only utilitarian. The other section in the main channel of the stream, is to be beautiful as well as useful.

Several years ago an engineer in the planning department of the county park commission had a thought that a dam that weaved—a serpentine structure—might pass more water than the traditional straight dam and also be more pic-

through the two loops and that the earth taken from the new channel be used to fill the old channel.

By the time the WPA had approved the project in February, 1937, the city parks, including Lincoln park, had been transferred to the county park commission. When the land planning department of that body saw the plans for Lincoln park, its members immediately envisioned more than a straightened river; they saw the recreational area that is now in the making.

But even for these men, whose dreams have become realities throughout Milwaukee county's park system, this was a dream that could only be realized after many years. It was to be a long time project. The WPA had accepted it only as a labor reservoir project—a place where workers would be employed only if there were no more pressing projects to keep them busy. And in June, 1937, WPA rolls were decreasing rapidly and there were few men for the Lincoln park project.

But when private employment faltered last fall, WPA rolls skyrocketed and more and more men were assigned to Lincoln park. By Jan. 1, it was employing more men than any other WPA project in Wisconsin. That situation has continued until today, when 1,400 men, working in two shifts, are digging or pushing wheelbarrows in the park.

"It is a job that could have been done in half the time with machinery," one WPA official said Saturday. "But it would probably never have been done with machinery, or if the county had had to do it alone. But the WPA had to find jobs for

men, and the river project was ideal for the purpose. In addition to giving men work we are making for Milwaukeeans one of the finest parks in the land, a park they would not have but for our help."

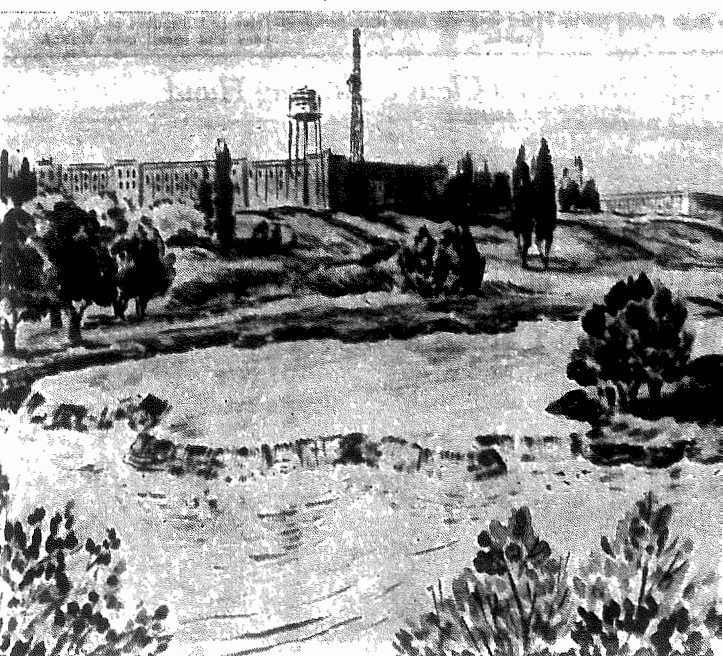
The costs, of course, are large. The WPA has appropriated \$850,000 for labor costs on the project. It is roughly estimated that the city and county, since 1934, have spent \$50,000 on the river work for equipment and materials.

### A Future Center for City's Recreation

THE WPA workers have dug out the great cuts that will form the main channel of the remade river and be the center of the water recreational area of the future. Only four dikes now keep the water from flowing into these cuts. With the land from the cuts, they are building up the islands of the future. More than 400,000 cubic yards of dirt will have been moved by the time the job is finished.

A smaller cut through the neck of the narrowest loop of the S has also been completed. It is through this cut that the Milwaukee river will flow after the steam shovel completes its job this week. The river will then flow through the most westerly channel.

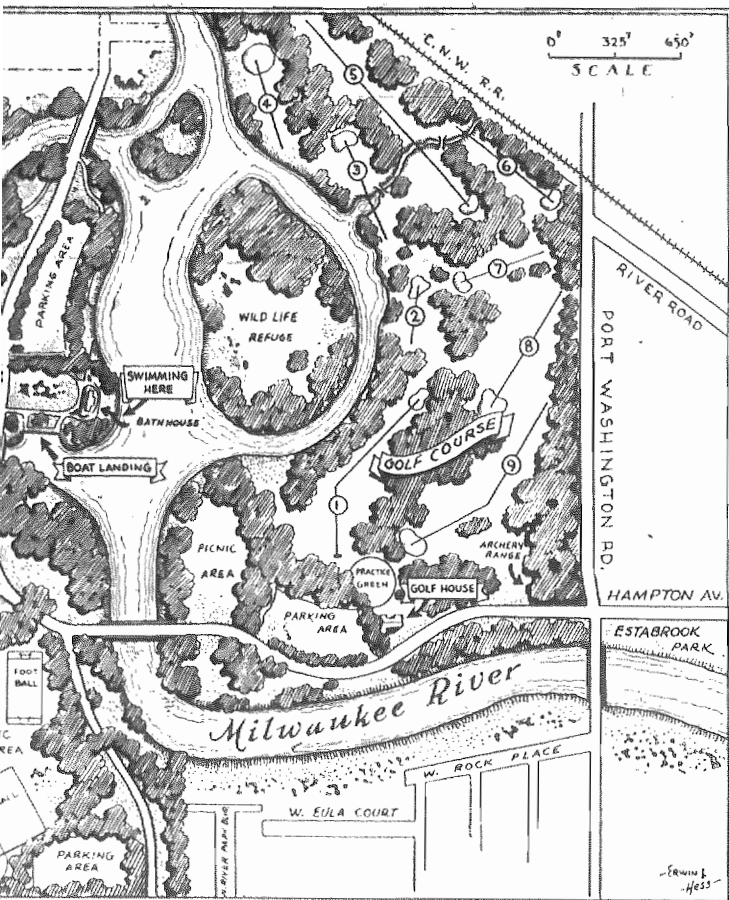
The WPA workers will spend the next few months cleaning out and deepening the present river bed in the eastern section to a seven or eight foot depth. Then the river will be diverted into the old channel and the new cuts and the western channel will be cleaned and deep-



Here is an artist's idea of how the Milwaukee river dam in Estabrook park will appear when completed. The dams will maintain a seven foot level of water.



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SUCH is the history of Lincoln park. A new page in that history is being written by the hundreds of men who today are scaring the earth with pick and shovel that future generations of Milwaukeeans may swim, and boat, and skate, and otherwise enjoy themselves in the place that William Lindwurm once termed useless.

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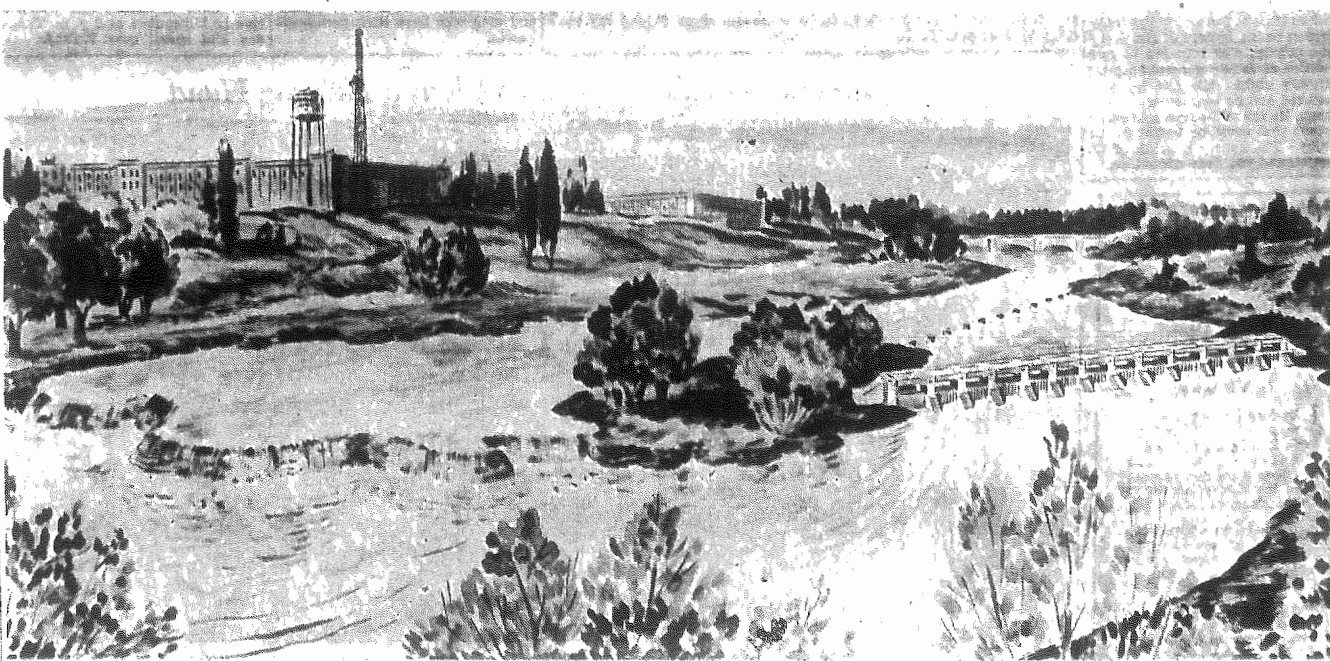
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Here is an artist's idea of how the Milwaukee river dam in Estabrook park will appear when completed. The gate section is finished and work has started on the spillway section, which is to look like a natural waterfall. The dams will maintain a seven foot level of water in the great recreational area that is being developed in Lincoln park.

—By a Journal Staff Artist