

THE REDEDICATION OF
THE JOYCE KILMER
MEMORIAL FIREPLACE



*rediscovering a forgotten
Como Park icon, the "Dutch Oven"*



THE REDEDICATION OF
THE JOYCE KILMER
MEMORIAL FIREPLACE

*rediscovering a forgotten
Como Park icon, the “Dutch Oven”*



*The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace on its original
dedication day in 1936,*

On May 19, 2011 – 75 years after its original dedication – the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace will get a second chance to serve the community as a place to meet, learn, and remember. The stories in this booklet are about that fireplace and the people, history, and trees that surround it.

Written by Deb Robinson

Research by Sharon Shinomiya, Deb Robinson and Katie Plese

Located in the heart of Saint Paul is a regional park – Como Park. Near the southwest corner of the park is a modest 17.75-acre woodlot. This is the last woodland of its size left in Como Park, a park originally noted for its many trees.

Como Park was designed by Horace W. S. Cleveland in 1889 to take full advantage of its natural assets – the original hilly landscape with its native trees. However, over the years, the majority of Como Park's 450 acres were developed more for human recreational activities. There are ball fields, picnic grounds, an amusement park, a conservatory, a city zoo, a golf course, a lakeside pavilion, and an aquatic center. Not much parkland is left for native trees and wildlife, which leads us to ask some crucial questions.

Is there room left in Como Park for a place where children and young-hearted adults can explore a woodland? Is there room for a place to discover the footprints of a fox, the nest of a Cooper's hawk, or the display grounds of courting butterflies? Is there room for a place to be inspired to write a poem about trees or to do a sketch of a native wildflower? Is there room for a place where we can rediscover the history of a memorial dedicated to a poet soldier? The answer is yes – Como Woodland – a tiny island of nature surrounded by urban development.

During the last few decades of the 1900s, the woodland had been degraded by vandalism, illegally dumped garbage, and invasive buckthorn trees. By 2003, local volunteers were coming together to clean up the woodland and to start removing the buckthorn. They also planned and dreamed how they might restore the forest and the memorial fireplace at its center. Those first volunteers and other stakeholders formed an advisory committee in 2006 to restore the woodland and promote designating it as an outdoor classroom.



Local volunteers started removing buckthorn from the Como Woodland in 2003

In 2007, a member of the Como Woodland Advisory Committee applied for Capital Improvement Budget (CIB) funding from the City of Saint Paul. This was the first request for funds to restore the crumbling Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace. At a public hearing, Como Woodland project advisors summarized their overall project goals to the CIB Committee:

St. Paul City Parks and Recreation Department, Como Park Senior High School students, and neighborhood volunteers have been working hard on restoring the woodland located in Como Park between Horton and Como Avenues. We plan to replant the area with native species, improve wildlife habitat, restore an onsite World War I hero's memorial, and use the area for education of students and relaxation for the general public.

Deb Robinson, Como Woodland Advisory Committee

The first CIB grant application also requested funds for a Comprehensive Master Plan to be drawn for the Como Woodland Outdoor Classroom site. The CIB Committee did not recommend funding to restore the memorial in 2007. Instead, funding for the project's master plan was recommended as a first step for the overall project.

An outline for a master plan had already been produced from input from project stakeholders: local teachers, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation staff, community members, and volunteer project advisors. City landscape architects took that stakeholders' input and Como Woodland Advisors' goals, and produced a Comprehensive Master Plan that brought the dream closer to reality.

The Comprehensive Master Plan has served as a framework for moving the project forward. The plan included seven different native plant communities (pine, oak savanna, oak woodland, sedge meadow, tallgrass prairie, wetland, transitional woodland), a native plant nursery, and numbered information posts installed at points of educational interest along a system of trails. The posts will have numbers that correspond to online lesson plans.

In 2010, the Minnesota State Legislature voted to grant funding from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund for phases two and three of the master plan – developing the native plant communities and the educational trail system. And the City of Saint Paul



Parks and Recreation Department directed funds to phase one – the restoration of the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace.

The restoration of the historic features of the Joyce Kilmer Memorial were always considered as important as restoring the forest – the connection

between trees and this memorial was undeniably strong from the start. The people historically connected to this woodland loved trees.

Trees with their great height, symmetry, and graceful habits, are the dominating feature in the general landscape scheme. Who would be without their shady comforts in the summer time; or fail to feel the deep thrill of opening buds in the spring time with their first flutter of green leaves. They bring the song birds and their nesting places to all homes.

William LaMont Kaufman

William LaMont Kaufman was Superintendent of Parks for over thirty years, starting in 1932. Under Superintendent Kaufman's direction, the little woodland in the southwest corner of Como Park was dedicated as a memorial arboretum in 1936. The centerpiece of the arboretum was a large stone fireplace – the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace – dedicated to a World War I hero, writer, husband, father, and author of the famous poem "Trees."

Nearly every American is familiar with the first two lines of this poem: "I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree." Most likely, this is all that the average person can recall, and the average person would know even less about the man who wrote it – not even his name. Kilmer was well known in his own time, but his fame did not last much longer than his short life. However, Kaufman was a man of Kilmer's time, and thought enough of Kilmer's bravery as a soldier as well as Kilmer's poem, "Trees," that he advocated for a memorial arboretum to be dedicated in Kilmer's name.

Sharon Shinomiya, Como Park historian

*I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.¹*

The words of Kilmer's poem struck a chord in the early 20th century. Although his style of written poetry may sound old-fashioned to our ears, we do recognize the deep symbolic significance in Kilmer's words. Trees have long served as a source of artistic and religious inspiration. And children know this instinctively. As we age into adulthood we often forget our innate connection to nature. However, as long as we remember what it was like to be a child in the woods, the sense of wonder we felt among the trees will stay with us all our lives.

¹The poem "Trees" was written by Joyce Kilmer for Mrs. Henry Mills Alden

My family lived [on] Argyle Street near Saint Andrew's [Church] for 50 years. I was two years old in '58 when my Mom and Dad, Jim and Nonie Warner, moved the family back into the neighborhood that Dad had grown up in. I was the third of nine children. As soon as I was old enough to venture out and off of our block Como Park beckoned me. What a wonderland place for a young imagination! Year after year we kids in the neighborhood made Como our personal playground. There wasn't a patch of it that went unexplored. The Dutch Oven [Kilmer Memorial Fireplace] was one of our favorite places to go. We could get all the firewood we needed from the woods that surrounded it. A good cub scout knew how to build a fire and cook a mean bologna sandwich. After a good lunch we'd play hide and seek on our bikes or on foot in those woods that seemed so big and so thick. One of the games we'd play was to cover the most distance from the Oven without touching the ground. Like little monkeys, we'd go from tree to tree. . . It was a magical place to grow up. . .

Jeffrey Warner, Como neighborhood resident

Many of us recognize trees as long-lived witnesses to our human history. Trees serve us as landmarks, and objects of literary and artistic inspiration as well as sources of scientific wonder. A tree can hold a child's fort or a tire swing in its strong limbs and present a challenge to a young tree climber. Living trees clean the air we breath, reduce stormwater runoff, cool and beautify our concrete and asphalt cityscapes, provide food and shelter for birds and other wildlife that we enjoy watching, and offer us nutritious fruits and nuts to eat.

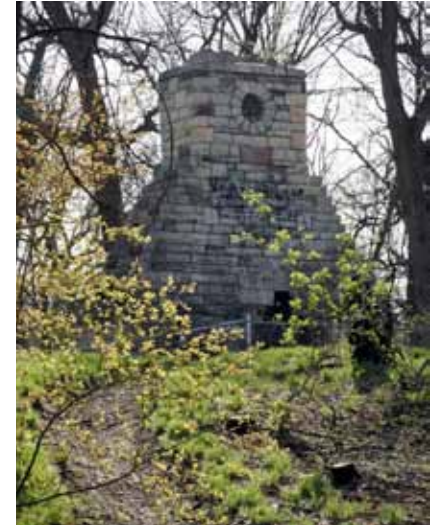
*A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast*



Harvested trees provide us with building material for homes and furniture, barns and baseball bats, telephone poles and railroad ties, and wood pulp for paper. Wood was and still is an important source of fuel for

heating and cooking. Wood is used for recreational fires in campsites, backyards, and, of course, in the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace.

The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace was built at the midpoint of a wooded site north of Como Avenue, south of Horton Avenue, and east of Hamline Avenue. Most local residents know this landscape feature as the "Dutch Oven." How this massive fireplace came by this fictitious name is unknown. Few of the people who are familiar with the "Dutch Oven" know that this fireplace is actually a memorial dedicated to the soldier and poet, Alfred Joyce Kilmer.



Alfred Joyce Kilmer was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1886. His interest in literature formed early at Rutgers College Grammar School. He met his future wife, Aline Murray, at Rutgers. He transferred to Columbia College in New York City, and shortly after graduation in 1908, he married his sweetheart and they started a family. Kilmer taught school for a year, but soon made the plunge into a literary career in New York City. He dropped his first name and wrote under the name Joyce Kilmer.

He also wrote poems, which were published in books, magazines, and newspapers. While he wrote poetry on a wide variety of topics, one of his more ardent poems, "Summer of Love," was clearly nature-inspired:

*June lavishes sweet-scented loveliness,
And sprinkles sun-filled wine on everything;
The very leaves grow drunk with bliss and sing,
And every breeze becomes a soft caress.
And earthly things felicity confess . . .*

Joyce Kilmer

Kilmer's poems found an adoring audience, but did not bring him enough income to support a family.

For a few years Kilmer worked as a lexicographer for Funk & Wagnalls, publisher of dictionaries and encyclopedias, and then he became the literary editor of *The Churchman*, where he wrote feature articles and reviews. He built a country home for his growing family in Mahwah, New Jersey.

Family life was the grounding force for the young writer. Kilmer made the long commute from Mahwah by train to his job in New York City. While the commute was time consuming, he enjoyed the many benefits of country living. Hiking the local hills near his country home and fishing the local lakes gave him an enduring appreciation of nature. He also loved good beer and good food taken in the company of good friends. But above all, he loved his wife and children.

In 1913, he started writing for the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, which involved interviewing the great thinkers and writers of the time, and reviewing books. During the same time he was editor of several literary digests. Soon Kilmer was in great demand as a lecturer. Hearing a writer's

words spoken in his own voice – especially poetry – was highly lauded in the early 1900s. Kilmer's passionate words and delivery as well as his quick wit and high intellect made him a popular speaker on the lecture circuit.

Life's accomplishments are often meaningless without loss, and Kilmer knew both joy and pain. His young daughter, Rose, was afflicted with polio in a time when there was no known treatment for the disease. In a letter to his friend, Father Daly, Kilmer wrote of his daughter's suffering:



Joyce Kilmer was a World War I hero and the author of the famous poem "Trees"

. . . Rose cannot move her legs or arms – she was so active and happy only last week – she cannot even cry – her voice is just a little whimper – the danger is of its reaching her lungs and killing her. I cannot write any more. You know how I feel. Pray for her.

Joyce Kilmer

*A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;*

During young Rose's illness, Kilmer suffered emotionally and spiritually as his daughter struggled for each breathe. It was during this time that Kilmer searched for solace in prayer and converted to Catholicism. In yet another letter to Father Daly, Kilmer wrote:

Just off Broadway, on the way from the Hudson Tube Station to the Times Building, there is a Church called the Church of the Holy Innocents. Since it is in the heart of the Tenderloin, this name is strangely appropriate – for there surely is need of youth and innocence. Well, every morning for months I stopped on my way to the office and prayed in this Church for faith. When faith did come, it came, I think, by way of my little paralyzed daughter. Her lifeless hands led me; I think her tiny feet know beautiful paths.

Joyce Kilmer

The disease did reach Rose's lungs and, at the tender age of five, she died. Rose's protracted suffering and death in 1917 appeared to contribute to a realignment of Kilmer's moral and intellectual compass. Kilmer's choices, combined with the unfolding events of World War I, put him on a fateful course with destiny. He seemed to have put his fate completely into God's hands, which made him a fearless soldier. Neither love of family nor love of his own life could detour him from a hero's death.

On April 23, 1917, shortly after the United States declared war on Germany, Kilmer enlisted in the New York National Guard. He could have stayed stateside because of his age and dependent family, but he was eager to go to the war's front line in France. After he arrived in France, Kilmer volunteered for more and more dangerous assignments. Within nine months of his arrival in France, and only three months after his requested transfer to the Regimental Intelligence Section, Kilmer was killed while doing reconnaissance in enemy territory on July 30, 1918, during the Second Battle of Marne.

At the time of Kilmer's death, this popular and respected man was deeply mourned by fellow soldiers serving overseas and by his many friends at home. Obviously, his death was a huge blow to his beloved wife Aline and their four young children. Also, his death at age 31 cut short his legacy as a writer. We'll never know how Joyce Kilmer would have developed as poet and author if he had survived the war.

Over the years his style of writing fell out of favor. And his final sacrifice for his country was all but forgotten. However, to put Kilmer's death into wider perspective, it's estimated that over 37 million soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded in World War I – few people in the world were left untouched by grief, suffering, and loss.

World War I was an awful war by any standards. The once lovely wooded hills and valleys along France's border with Germany became the battered Western Front. Both sides were dug in for protracted trench warfare. Massive bomb blasts buried soldiers alive standing upright in their trenches. The bombs also carried poisonous gas that killed and maimed soldiers in slow, painful ways. Tangles of barbed wire hindered advancement through the nightmarish no-man's-land between enemy lines. Often the deadly attacks and counter-attacks did little to change the front line. Kilmer, along with millions of other soldiers and civilians, died. Everyone who lived through the war lost family and friends.

But memorials are built to help future generations remember. The designer of the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace was William LaMont Kaufman.

He was an American soldier who, although gravely wounded in France during World War I, lived to return home.

*A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;*

My dad was a very young man when he left home to go to war . . . when he was twenty-one years old, and World War I was raging in Europe. This was the war that introduced the dreaded mustard gas. Inhaling this gas was treacherous to a soldier, ruining his health for life. To inhale a great amount would prove to be fatal. My dad was wounded by shrapnel in his leg and seriously ill from the effects of mustard gas . . . He was never entirely well for the rest of his life.

Patricia Knapp, daughter of William LaMont Kaufman

In April of 1920, one year after his discharge from Fort Snelling Hospital, William LaMont Kaufman arrived at the Como Streetcar Station. With the use of a cane, he walked through Como Park and into the office of then Superintendent of Parks, Fred Nussbaumer, to ask for a job. Kaufman recalled his first meeting with Nussbaumer in his notes: "He was a very gruff, stern old German and I was a little nervous as I handed him a ten cent cigar. With this rather expensive peace offering I gave him my letter of introduction and told him of my past nursery work and what I intended to do." Kaufman's long association with Como Park had begun.

*William LaMont Kaufman was
Superintendent of Parks from 1932 to 1966*



Kaufman did get a job with the City of Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation working on projects such as planting the shade trees along Summit Avenue and setting the stakes for the roadway through Cherokee Park. Difficult work no doubt, but one part of his job was difficult emotionally. In 1920, the bodies of American soldiers killed in France during World War I were arriving by train at the Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul. Kaufman wrote of this in his notes:

It was the custom at that time for the City of St. Paul to place floral wreaths on each returning casket. These wreaths came from the Como Greenhouse. Many times I would take a wreath to the depot and place it on the casket. I had seen so much of action and men killed that it was hard for me to do. The boxes were so travel worn and covered with soot and dust.

William LaMont Kaufman

But 1920 was also a year of new beginnings for Kaufman. He married Louise Michel – Kaufman’s first step towards a long and happy family life. The following fall and winter, Kaufman returned to school and received his diploma in Landscape Architecture from the Missouri Botanical Gardens. He returned to Saint Paul to work for George Nason, an established Harvard-trained landscape architect. Nason’s influence helped shape Kaufman’s own career as a landscape architect.

George Nason became Superintendent of Parks in 1924. A few years later, Kaufman followed him back into the City of Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation. William LaMont Kaufman, in his turn, became Superintendent of Parks in 1932, and would happily serve in that position until his retirement in 1966.

Over the 30-plus years that Kaufman was Superintendent of Parks, there was an economic depression, and another world war followed by a cold war. Through thick and thin, Kaufman watched over and cared for Saint Paul’s parks, especially Como Park, as if they were part of his own family. Kaufman obtained food for the Como Zoo animals when there were no city funds to buy animal feed, he built zoo animal houses in his own

basement, and he made plant markers for the Como Conservatory on his own time. In her memoirs of her childhood years, Kaufman’s daughter, Patricia, shared one particularly personal story that revealed her father’s caring nature:

I was barely three years old when we were in the midst of a fierce summer storm . . . I was frightened and stayed close to my dad. . . As soon as the sun emerged he took me by the hand, down the steps to see the trees. On the ground lay a bird nest with four tiny baby birds, each with a broken neck. I cried, my kind and gentle dad picked up the nest and cried with me. This memory has always stayed so clearly with me as it was one of the few times I saw not just my dad, but any adult man, cry.

Patricia Knapp

*Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.*

William LaMont Kaufman’s design for the southwest corner of Como Park included a monolithic stone fireplace encircled by a council ring – the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace. For the location just a short distance west of the fireplace he designed a graceful series of waterfalls that cascaded into a large pool – the Joyce Kilmer Cascades. The woodland surrounding



WPA labor built both the Kilmer Cascades (pictured) and the Kilmer Fireplace

these landscape features was identified as an arboretum. On November 11, 1935 (the 17th anniversary of the ceasefire that ended hostilities at

the Western Front of World War I), Kaufman approached the Kilmer Post of the American Legion to ask for their help. In this unedited letter Kaufman wrote:

An arboretum, now under construction in Como Park will be named after the Poet Soldier – Joyce Kilmer. Naturally this will be of particular interest to this Legion Post, who years ago honored Joyce Kilmer by naming the Post after him. What more fitting tribute could you now pay him, than to lend your efforts towards establishing this living memorial to him . . . “The author of Trees.” Today is Armistice or Peace day, and the very thought behind our efforts is to create a place of quiet, peace and beauty, among the trees, shrubs and flowers native to Minnesota. So little is left of nature in our large cities, that it behooves us to preserve and rebuild what has been destroyed. The site selected has many natural advantages, such as rolling hills, valleys, with a natural lagoon which will be fed by a limestone waterfalls. . . Many fine trees in their natural state are now growing here and plans have been made to plant and label all the family groups of trees and shrubs native to Minnesota Winding paths have been constructed thru the woods and these will converge on a central knoll where a huge double stone fireplace is now partly built. As years go and this project becomes more firmly established we will win the thanks and gratitude of all nature lovers.

William LaMont Kaufman

The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace was built during the hard economic times of the Great Depression. Funds for the fireplace memorial were donated by the Joyce Kilmer Post, Fourth District of the American Legion, of which Kaufman was himself a member. Labor for the fireplace was provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal relief program that provided jobs for unemployed workers during the Great Depression. An old newspaper article said that the stone used to build the fireplace came from the Saint Paul City Hall, which had been demolished three years earlier in 1933. An old drinking fountain was removed from

behind the Parks Office and reused to make the three arches of the Kilmer Fireplace. According to Kaufman’s notes, the council ring around the fireplace was made with recycled stone from “. . . the old Foley Home on Summit Avenue.” All this frugality and reuse of materials was necessary because of the poor economic climate of the 1930s, but those limitations only added character and history to the fireplace. Kaufman also mentions, “A suitable rustic sign was hung in a large oak tree with Joyce Kilmer’s poem ‘Trees’ burned into hardwood.” The memorial was completed in 1936.

The big stone fireplace was well used and well loved by locals. Como resident Ed Kern remembered, “Lots of hot dogs cooked there . . . it was a great meeting place for Como kids growing up.” While Kaufman was Superintendent of Parks, the Kilmer Memorial Fireplace was almost certainly looked after. But men, like memories, fade with time. New buildings and landscape projects in more visible areas of Como Park drew attention away from the quiet woodland where the fireplace stood resolute. At some point in the 1960s, the fireplace and surrounding woods became a destination of a dubious sort.

After nightfall, the peaceful secluded fireplace and woodland could



turn into a risky place when teenagers gathered to party. Tempers flared when those parties grew rowdy. Flames would leap from the chimney as dangerously large fires built in the Kilmer Memorial Fireplace burned away the mortar that held the fireplace stones together.



Neighborhood residents, like Mable Schultz and Joyce Curtis, put the Kilmer Fireplace to use (1939)

I was a freshman at Cretin high, and John . . . and Jim . . . and I heard about a big party at the “Dutch Oven” so we went over there on a Saturday night to check it out. There must have been 150 people there. Just as we arrived I saw a guy I knew named Jack . . . getting his butt kicked by five guys. Five against one didn’t seem fair so I decided to get involved. They were standing on the 2-foot high wall that went around the Oven. I told them I would fight them one at a time, after I said that one of them kicked me in the face, I got up, hit him once and then all five jumped on me and held me down and almost killed me. They punched and kicked me till I was almost unconscious, then someone said ‘the cops are coming’ so everybody took off . . . I had two black eyes, cuts and bruises all over my body. Was a night I never forgot even after 50 years.

Chuck Doole, former Como neighborhood resident

By the 1980s, the Kilmer Cascades had fallen into complete ruin, and invasive trees and plants invaded the arboretum. But the fireplace, though disfigured and its name forgotten, endured.

*Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.*

In the autumn of 2010, the weather was picture perfect for the Como Woodland tours leading up to the Poet-tree Workshops. During their walk to the Como Woodland Outdoor Classroom site, the students were in high spirits – kids just happy to be outdoors in the fresh air under clear blue skies. The walking tours were designed to acquaint these 139 fifth and sixth graders with the Como Woodland, the Kilmer Memorial Fireplace, and the many benefits of our city trees.

The walking tours of the Como Woodland were a prerequisite to the Poet-tree Workshops. Volunteer Como Woodland Advisors were the tour guides, organizers, and fundraisers for the workshops. Chelsea Heights Elementary fifth graders toured Como Woodland on September



Chelsea Heights Elementary fifth graders visit the Kilmer Fireplace on September 13, 2010

13 and their Poet-tree Workshops took place the following day in their classrooms. Como Park Elementary sixth graders toured the Como Woodland on October 15 and their Poet-tree Workshops took place three days later.

Why use an outdoor classroom to teach poetry? The Como Woodland Advisory Committee promotes outdoor education because it’s a powerful learning tool. Participating students were able to retain and contextualize the local history and natural history offered at the Como Woodland Outdoor Classroom and apply that learning during the (indoor) classroom poetry workshops. Additional reasons for the Poet-tree Workshops and the tours that proceeded them were to introduce more local elementary students to the Como Woodland Outdoor Classroom; to help participating students bond to the natural world and the local community; to provide connections between art, community, history, and environmental sciences; and to welcome the addition of the arts, culture, and the humanities into the outdoor classroom alongside environmental sciences.



Kilmer Fireplace scaffolding was wrapped in plastic so masons could work through the winter

The Poet-tree Workshop classroom guide was professional poet and educator John Minczeski. He led five workshops, one for each participating class, in which each of the five elementary classes wrote a group poem. Many students wrote individual poems as well. Minczeski

introduced the students to the basic tools of poetry and how to use those tools. As a published poet himself, Minczeski believes that “Poems must surprise in some way – even serious poems must contain elements of surprise.” Kids love surprises and were happy to include them in their own poems. But it was no surprise that the poor condition of the fireplace was frequently mentioned in their poems. Como Woodland advisors assured the students that restoration of the Kilmer Fireplace would soon begin. And all the students were invited to attend a rededication ceremony the following spring to celebrate the fireplace’s renewal.

Towards the end of November 2010, as winter approached, scaffolding was erected around the fireplace. The historical restoration masons of A & M Construction enclosed the entire fireplace and scaffolding in plastic. Using portable heaters inside this plastic cocoon the masons worked on the fireplace over the snowy winter of 2010/2011.

On May 19, 2011, the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace will emerge renewed and ready to again be a place where children and young-hearted adults can meet, learn, and remember. And soon, with our continued efforts at restoration, the surrounding woodland outdoor classroom site will live up to Kaufman’s 1935 claim that, “As years go and this project becomes more firmly established we will win the thanks and gratitude of all nature lovers.”



Students took notes in preparation for their Poet-tree Workshop

COMO WOODLANDS

by Ms. Dudeck’s sixth grade class, Como Park Elementary

I shivered under the trees that Friday
as I looked at the flowers—I didn’t know
what kind—pink, yellow, purple.
As the leaves changed from green
to orange and yellow, as the wind,
like the coolish moon traveling
around the world, touched my skin.
As I felt my blood rushing, the river raced,
my heart pumped in and out, and leaves crunched,
as I stepped on them.

There used to be a waterfall before
time stopped for it, and the well dried up.
There used to be a fireplace. Deer once grazed
on pine cones and black berries.
A bridge led to this path, and the cascades.


The 1930s are gone, with the eagles
and the years. The invasive
thistles have driven out the native plants.
I looked at all the sad trees, that Friday,
the ground overflowing with leaves
that will fertilize new growth, as though
it is the future of the world.



A WALK IN THE COMO WOODLAND

by Ms. Bartol's fifth grade class, Chelsea Heights Elementary

The smell of green leaves
reminded me of camping in autumn
in the forests of Duluth.



The wind in the leaves
drowned out the traffic
on Como Avenue.

The broken-up fireplace
with worn bricks gave a feeling
of peace, and I was calm
as a baby sleeping, as a kitten
in the windowsill, or on my stomach.


The smell was like cookie dough
with chocolate chips and milk.

The grass was a pillow,
a marshmallow with the chill
of autumn. I wanted to eat
s'mores.

I sat on the ground and pretended
I was under water.
I wondered how many ants
were on my shoes.

The bridge was
a mountain. I wondered
how I could get the burrs
off my back.

On the return, a mouse
or mole lay dead
on the smooth grass.



A DOOR TO THE FOREST

by Ms. Kour's sixth grade class, Como Park Elementary

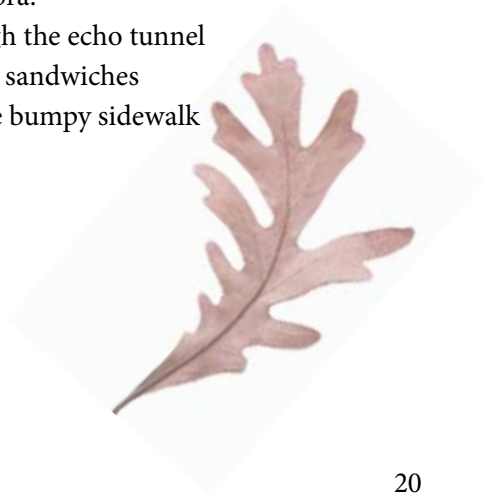
We walked through the healthy air
as the wind blew on our faces
like cardinals and blue jays
flying branch to branch,
among trees bare as statues.

The leaves had parachuted to the ground,
abandoning the old maples and oaks.

Burrs and brown thistles clung to us
like porcupine needles. We strayed down
the prickly path that was like a fallen tree,
and sat on the dew-damp grass. Birds sang,
wind whistled past us.

I saw the dead waterfall
buried behind the trees, and I thought
how peaceful, how like the pattern
of wind on a pond, like the beat
of an owl's wings.

Then our stomachs growled like lions
ripping apart a zebra.
We walked through the echo tunnel
to the big field. To sandwiches
and milk, then the bumpy sidewalk
back to school.





A WALK IN THE WOODS


by Mr. Binns' sixth grade class, Como Park Elementary

I smelled the fresh humid air
at the memorial for that poet.
I held the pod of a Kentucky
Coffee Tree—dry
and brown like beef jerky.
Pollen as orange as Cheetos
suddenly appeared on the tips of my shoes.
I avoided the circle
of poison ivy at the fireplace.

Even with its broken stones,
it was taller than the ceilings at Como School.
I sat at the ruined picnic table
that felt like ice,
with blue and black graffiti growing over it
like vines.

At lunch we went to the baseball diamond
to play football. Pierre
made two interceptions. Peyton
made two touchdowns.
I ate nothing that was cooked.
I raced my friend.

Standing on the deck at Como Lake,
I saw a fisherman haul in a large branch.
On the bridge, as we walked back
to school, a black and white cat
paused to stare at us.



A WALK THROUGH HISTORY

by Mr. Malloy's fifth grade class, Chelsea Heights Elementary

Red and orange crumbling leaves layered the ground like cat litter, like frosting on a cake. The day as bright as a red and yellow fiery ball, at one in the afternoon. The old fireplace, a crumbling mountain covered with vines, made me think of Grandview Lodge.

We sat in the dried up pond, looking at what had once been a waterfall. I wondered how it was built and why it wasn't cared for. Why didn't they put fish in it—sunnies, northern, bass and salmon?


An avalanche of a memorial. Ash tree, oak, pine, poison ivy, burdock. I watched a lady pick up a dead mole. I watched dogs on leashes, running and walking. An orange and black caterpillar was lying still on the sidewalk. And the day went on. School, home, homework, bed.



COMO WOODLANDS

by Janessa, sixth grade, Como Park Elementary

As I enter
the beginning of the woodlands,
I can hear the leaves
rustling under my shoes.
The wind singing, making
the trees dance, wave their arms.
I can see the leaves falling from
above, tripping over and
laying on the ground and singing
songs as the sun through the
trees beams on them.
The trees smiling, the
grass soaking up the sun,
enjoying their lifetimes before they're
covered by a light cold pillow of snow.





A WALK IN COMO PARK

by Anthony, fifth grade, Chelsea Heights Elementary

The pathway is dark, forbidden
The light is shining through
The old fireplace, stones worn and broken,
once housed fires, in days that are gone, lost in time.

Leaves, bright, colorful
Yellow, green, purple, red
Fluttering in the cool autumn breeze
Birds singing, trees swaying
in the cool, crisp air.

Animals, scampering, playing
Running through the trees
Playing on the ground.

Flowers, sights and smells,
perfume in the wind,
cool, peppermint wind.

Fall.



LONELY OLD FIREPLACE

by Brittany, sixth grade, Como Park Elementary

The fireplace is filled with memories just sitting there waiting and waiting and waiting for it to be remembered again while people just pass by it and don't even notice and every time a memory is forgotten a brick falls tumbling to the ground it's crying and weeping just begging not to be forgotten now it's down to the last few bricks.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Volunteers provided the content and labor for this booklet.

All the students' poems from Poet-tree Workshops will be posted, as well as a full list of booklet references, on the Como Woodland Advisory Committee website: www.comowoodland.org

The Como Woodland Advisory Committee would like to thank all of those who helped with the Poet-tree Workshops and Kilmer Fireplace Rededication booklet and event:

Historical resources from John Covell, Patricia Knapp, Miriam Kilmer.

Dutch Oven memories from Chuck Doole, Jeff Warner, Louise Portuese, Ed Kern.

Research by Sharon Shinomiya, Deb Robinson, Katie Plese

Employees of the City of Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation Director Michael Hahm, Bryan Murphy, Brad Meyer, Karl Mueller, Adam Robbins, Kelley Dinsmore, Ruth Schumi, Cy Kosel.

Poet-tree Web pages by Jennifer Otremba, Ruth Macdonald

Poet-tree Workshops coordination by Sharon Shinomiya.

Participating Poet-tree Workshop teachers from Chelsea Heights Elementary: Lynn Bartol and Josh Malloy; and Como Park Elementary: Kelly Dudeck, Michael Binns, Ra Kour.

Poet-tree Workshop Fund donors Matt Schmitt, Sharon Shinomiya, Susan Jane Cheney, Deb Robinson, Chris Bedford, Theresa Heyer, Jennifer Otremba, Robert Anderson, Val Cunningham, Aleli Balagtas, Sally Worku, Panod Klongtruatroke, Rhonda DeBough.

Photos and photo file work by Matt Schmitt; Additional photos (excluding historicals) by Sharon Shinomiya, Deb Robinson; Text written by Deb Robinson.

Proofreader: Naomi Jackson

Booklet layout design: Jane Kirkwood, Just Jane Inc.

Printing by City of Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation