

Delbert J. Haff

Early Parks and Boulevards Legal Counsel
1859-1943

by Janice Lee

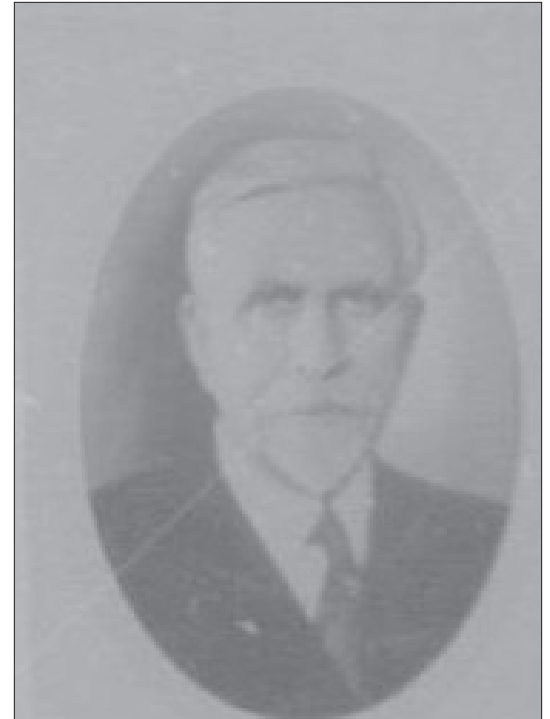
A granite monument near Swope Park commemorates lawyer and civic leader Delbert James Haff. Haff left an even more impressive monument to Kansas City: the foundation for a nationally recognized parks and boulevards system.

Delbert Haff came to Kansas City from Michigan in 1886, armed with a new law degree and abundant energy. As his downtown law practice flourished, Haff plunged into the many civic movements springing up in the city. Dedicated to improving the rough, unsightly landscape of 1880s Kansas City, he helped form and lead the Municipal Improvement Association. He drafted an ingenious Park Law that gave the city the authority to create and maintain parks and boulevards, along with an innovative way to fund the new system.

When the fledgling park board hired him as its attorney, Haff brilliantly defended his Park Law against bitter attacks from big taxpayers and real-estate owners. His triumph freed the park board to create an extensive, innovative parks and boulevards system. The series of winding boulevards connecting naturalistically landscaped parks became one of the nation's best examples of the City Beautiful Movement.

Haff worked hard to improve the parks and boulevards system when he served on the Board of Park Commissioners from 1909 to 1912. He not only ensured that Kansas City's parks and boulevards stayed in good repair, he also toured other parks throughout the country to gather new ideas. When Haff led the park board as president in 1910 and 1911, the board extended the parks and boulevards system by 60 square miles.

By the time of his death in 1943, D.J. Haff had established himself as one of the fathers of the parks system and as a highly respected lawyer. Kansas City's groundbreaking parks and boulevard system owes its beginnings to his remarkable legal skill, tireless energy, and dedication to improving the city landscape.



Sources

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