

A QUIET CENTENNIAL

Century-old former animal fountain in Ottawa carries on as planter

CHARLES STANLEY
CHARLES@STREATORTIMES.COM
815-431-6063

With its usual display of plants, it's easy to mistake the raised granite basin for a heavy duty planter.

But when it arrived in Ottawa a century ago it was one of more than 100 free fountains designed for the benefit of horses, dogs and cats that were installed from coast to coast.

Now located on the east end of Ottawa Avenue, at the intersection with Leland Street, the National Humane Alliance Fountain most likely was originally situated elsewhere and moved when motor vehicles lessened the need for prominent public horse troughs.

Gary Spears of Streator, who grew up in Ottawa, can remember the fountain being in its current location when he played on the wide Ottawa Avenue median.

"When I lived on the avenue in the mid- to late 60s, we used the median to play football."

In those days, Ottawa Avenue was recovering from the Dutch Elm disease that wiped out the once stately trees.

"Back in the late 1900s, the avenue went from having huge beautiful elm trees with great canopies that practically spread across the whole avenue to barren. The city replanted trees in the early 60s, but of course they were just saplings, so there was a lot of room to play."

"Because the trees were small, that fountain was a lot more visible then. Now you just drive by and hardly notice it."

The real purpose of the granite basin is set forth on its attached plaque, which says it was presented in 1910 by the National Humane Alliance founded by Hermon Lee Ensign.

Ensign, born in 1846, was a journalist and advertising man who founded the National Humane Alliance in 1887. His goal was to instill in people, "especially the young, ideas of humanity both to the lower animals and each other."

After he died in 1899, he left



The Heron, Charles Stanley

Now serving as a planter on Ottawa Avenue, the National Humane Alliance animal fountain was a gift to Ottawa in 1910.

an endowment to provide funds to install the fountains to towns that would agree to strict rules of installation.

The fountains had to be 20 feet away from streetcar tracks, telephone poles and curbs and "keep supplied with water continuously."

The granite was quarried and the fountains produced on

Vinalhaven, an island off the coast of Maine. There were various styles, but common features were the bowl for horses fed water from lions' head spigots and lower spigots to fill cups with water for dogs and cats. The lions' heads are missing from the



Photo provided

The National Humane Alliance (above) fountain in Derby, Conn., was resorted and made the centerpiece of a new plaza. The spelling of the name "Hermon" on the fountain (at left) is correct. The National Humane Alliance animal fountains were designed to serve horses from the top basin and dogs and cats from the lower cups.

Ottawa fountain but duplicates can be purchased.

Fountains also were installed in Sheffield, Moine, Rock Island and Davenport, Iowa. Although the fountains have

been phased out from practical use in most cities, some are restoring them.

In Abbeville, S.C., the fountain sits across from the courthouse within a cement pool.

One of the most ambitious restorations was in Derby, Conn., where the fountain was put back in working order and is the centerpiece of the Derby greenway plaza.

The plaza features benches and more than 125 bricks with imprinted messages from local people and those with ties to the town.

Photos of 36 of the remaining National Humane Alliance fountains can be viewed online at <http://electronicvalley.org/derby/gaze/pages/wateringtrough.htm>.

Denver's National Humane Alliance fountain in use in 1920.



Photo provided



Clipped By:
johnwalshderby
Wed, Sep 11, 2019