



SIOUX CITY, IOWA

# Latham Park

*A Beloved Old Friend at the End of Her Resources*

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Benjamin and Elizabeth Latham retired from farming in 1899 and moved their three children to the Morningside area in Sioux City. Later, their two sons built the Latham Park home, which they completed in 1916. Today, Latham Park, including the house and grounds, is nearly one acre in size and comprises the northern half of a city residential block. The traditional design of the grounds has been faithfully maintained. However, after many years, rising costs and dwindling trust assets have put the future of the park in jeopardy. Community members and Friends of Latham Park have been generous. Ultimately, however, it will require approximately \$750,000 to build an endowment that returns \$20,000 for ongoing maintenance and restoration needs - otherwise, Latham Park is in danger of being subdivided and sold to developers.

## HISTORY

Elbert and Leslie Latham, Benjamin and Elizabeth Latham's sons, were skilled carpenters, and they built the Latham house in a prairie farmhouse style. Clara Latham, their sister, eventually established a trust to preserve her home as a community park for the enjoyment of Sioux City's residents. She passed away in 1937, but her legacy has remained as one of the city's beloved treasures. The upper floors of the Latham house now provide living quarters for the parks' resident caretakers, who are talented artisans and horticulturists, while the three main floor rooms are used for meetings and receptions. The grounds, whose traditional design has been faithfully maintained, are home to an endless variety of flowering plants, warbling songbirds, quiet sitting areas, and Sioux City's oldest fountain, which was restored in 2004.



The importance of Latham Park and the reasons for preservation are as numerous and significant as the memories that embrace the park. Life happens here! As the site of hundreds of weddings, anniversary parties, birthday celebrations, book club gatherings, church services, and family reunions, the memories abound. People recall picnics in the park as children while others remember reading here, stealing a kiss, taking their first steps, receiving a marriage proposal, getting caught smoking, or being asked to remove their pet from the park. Just as important, there are the memories of solace, of admiring the beauty of nature, a quiet walk with a loved one, or enjoying a cup of tea in the secret garden. Although Sioux City has a variety of parks, recreational, and playground areas, Latham Park is one of a kind. The integrity of purpose and design has been lovingly protected throughout the years. Improvements have reflected a respect of the traditional and classic beauty of the little park and as such, have strengthened its enduring charm. And the community's cultural enjoyment has flourished in the diversity of events showcased at Latham Park: old-fashioned ice cream socials, barbershop quartets, Victorian tea parties, horticultural therapy for children and adults, eclectic art festivals, and concerts. As you can see, Latham Park is rooted in the community and vice versa. It is small, charming, a magical little spot of peace and beauty right in the middle of a city! Therein lies the commitment and dedication to preserving Latham Park.

## THE THREAT

Although many people believe it is one of Sioux City 's hidden gems, Latham Park is in danger of being lost to the community. After many years, rising costs and dwindling trust assets have put the future of the park in jeopardy. It will require approximately \$750,000 to build an endowment that returns \$20,000 for ongoing maintenance and restoration needs. Without the needed annual funding, Latham Park and the its prairie style farmhouse are in danger of being sold to developers. Community members have been extremely generous in donating materials and labor, but significant work is needed on the house and some of the park's structural elements to prevent irreparable deterioration. The goal is to raise enough funds annually to meet current operating expenses and increase the endowment by at least \$10,000.

In 2003, a group of concerned and dedicated citizens formed the Friends of Latham Park Association that is working diligently with the Clara Latham Charitable Trust Fund to help support the park. The Association's membership is diverse, and each member brings a special passion to the preservation efforts: currently, the group includes historians, gardeners, community activists, artists, neighbors and people with all kinds of special connections to the park. The Sioux City Preservation Commission also is helping on this important project.

To date, the Friends of Latham Park Association has raised approximately \$45,000, which has gone towards annual operating expenses and immediate repairs and/or restoration needs. One of its goals has been to raise awareness of the park's plight in the community. Its strategic objectives and activities are to:

- Promote tax-deductible donation status to potential donors
- Involve donor estate planning and bequests
- Organize annual fundraiser gala and other events
- Create and prioritize house and grounds projects
- Expand fundraising through grants and networking with other organizations
- Educate the public on horticulture & historic preservation
- Involve youth groups in clean-up and planting



- Offer on-site educational events
- Seek grant funding and/or matching gift opportunities
- Analyze the fee schedule for park usage to ensure that fees reflect related expenses
- Solicit donations of cash, materials, services, or event sponsorship
- Adopt a “pet” improvement project from the Park’s wish list including naming opportunities

As more and more community members become aware of the threat, we repeatedly hear “I thought it would just always be there.” Latham Park is dangerously close to the end of its resources, and its supporters continually seek tangible support to keep the park alive. This little treasure is rich in wonderful memories-both old and new; however, the Associations must hear from those who care before all that’s left of Latham Park is a memory.

## HOW TO HELP

Donate money

The Friends of Latham Park Association  
1915 S Lemon Street  
Sioux City, Iowa 51106

People who have lived in and/or who love the Midwest may best understand how much history is at risk here!

web resources

[www.lathampark.com](http://www.lathampark.com)