



## Desoto Park

The origins of Desoto Park follow the donation of Washingtonia Robusta, scrub palms by the Chamber of Commerce. C.E. Windhovel who was the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce beautification committee wanted to see palms planted around the lake as part of a desire to beautify the appearance of downtown. Windhovel collected \$404 and the city donated \$200. 226 palms were purchased from Glen St. Mary and hauled for free by J.C. Marsh. Windhovel and 60 men planted the palms around the lake. Another 57 palms were purchased by private citizens and planted around town bringing the total to 283. C.E. Windhovel then moved to create Desoto Park by getting permission from the County to allow the City to create a park behind the courthouse. He received \$1250 dollars to make the improvements that he needed. He pulled weeds and planted flowers and prepared the park to be opened by October 1, 1928. Windhovel also introduced the first six ducks to Lake Desoto on February 22, 1929 as part of this project to make Lake Desoto more presentable. This marked a series of beautification projects that Windhovel spearheaded downtown. When the city pushed to expand access to Veteran Housing in 1930, an opportunity was jumped upon to dedicate the park to World War 1 Vets to show the city's commitment to the Veteran's living here. On August 15, 1930, Dr. T.H. Bates and Rev. E.F. Montgomery worked with the American Legion, Congressman R.A. Green, and the Secretary of the War Department to obtain a trench mortar from World War 1 to serve as a memorial of the Veterans of the First World War. It was to be secured from the Raritan Ordnance Depot. It was decided by the American Legion that it would be secured and set up in Desoto Park behind the Columbia County Court House and was to face out over Lake Desoto. The mortar along with two captured Machine Guns were dedicated on Armistice Day, Today's Veterans Day on November 11, 1930. On the day of its dedication, all the stores in Lake City closed for the ceremony. Dr. Montgomery offered the invocation, Dr. Bates gave a history of Armistice Day, A.J. Rountree introduced the congressman, and R.A. Green dedicated the marker. At the time, it was hoped that a bronze tablet with the war dead from the county could be added, but that never occurred. When a new court house addition was added in 1959, the park was reduced to the expansion behind the existing courthouse. A second marker was added to the lake and park following the draining of the lake and the discovery of the sixteen rifles that were stolen and thrown in the lake during Reconstruction. The marker was placed along the shores of the lake in February 1994. The park was again reduced when the Court expanded and modernized the courthouse between 1998 and 2002. As these changes did away with the existing park, the memorials and monuments were shifted to the edge of Lake Desoto and reassembled in 2003. As the park neared completion, the monument to the fallen heroes of Columbia County was added and dedicated on July 1, 2003 marking the completion of the new Desoto Park.

