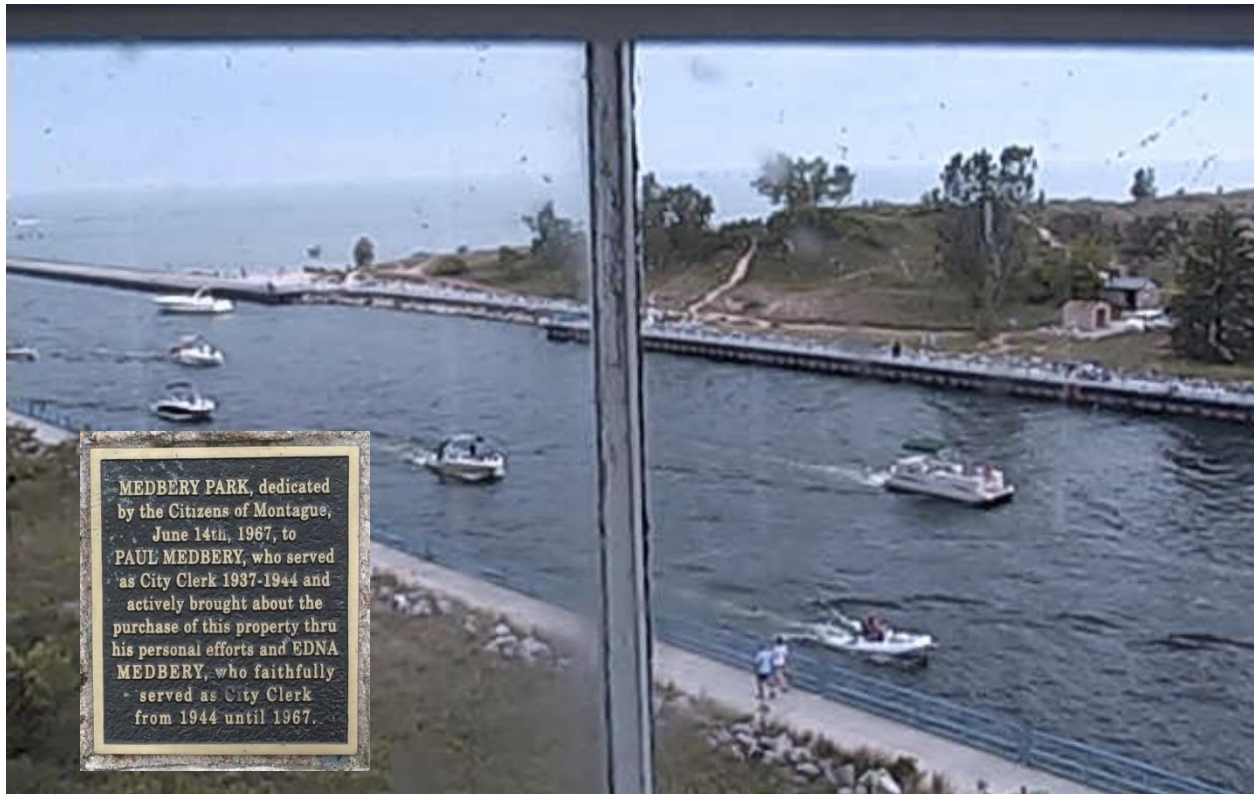


Medbery Park

By Barbara Bedau Brow
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A view of Medbery Park from the White Lake Lighthouse and Museum Webcam.

Medbery Park is owned by the City of Montague and located on the north side of the White Lake Channel in White River Township. The Channel forms the south boundary of the property, and it continues northerly along the Lake Michigan shoreline for 600 feet. Years before it became a public park, the area had a much different use.

On a map from 1877, George Dowling was shown as owning land along the north side of the recently built White Lake Channel running between the Old Channel and Lake Michigan. He offered to donate a portion of this land to the government for \$1 a year for as long as the Lifeguard Station was in use. The construction of a Life Saving Station began in 1885 and was ready for its first crew in 1886.

Over time 6 or 8 government-built houses were erected for the Coast Guard personnel and their families along the channel on either side of the station. A watch tower was also built on the beach to aid them in their sighting of vessels or people in distress and need of assistance.

When the Life Saving Station first opened it operated for many years by a volunteer crew before becoming a permanent Coast Guard Station. In the later years, the crews varied from as few as two to as many as 10 men.

Delsey B. Welcher and his son-in-law John Fisher had a fishing operation near the Coast Guard Station from 1923 to 1933 when Welcher died. John Fisher continued with the fishing operations there until 1944.

In 1928 the Grover Brothers started their commercial fishing business on the north side of the White Lake Channel. In 1948, the firm dissolved. Floyd Grover dropped out and James Grover carried on. Grover opened a fish market in Montague in 1953. Grover continued to operate the fishing business on the north side of the White Lake Channel until 1975.

In September 1940, a committee of well-known men, representing the cities of Montague and Whitehall and various civic organizations met with Dr. B. A. Hamilton, who was the owner of some Lake Michigan beach property, in an effort to obtain the property for public use.

As early as 1941, there were reports that the government was planning to abandon some of the Coast Guard stations on the Great Lakes, with personnel being transferred to stations on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

By April 1943, the Montague City Council passed a resolution to purchase the strip of Lake Michigan frontage extending north 600 feet from the White Lake Channel for the sum of \$5,000.

Three of the former Coast Guard houses located west of the station were purchased by private individuals; and while they were privately owned cottages, the city owned the land the cottages sat on.

In 1943, a fee of \$25 per year per house for 5 years, with an option of 5 more years, was approved by the City Council to be charged to the owners of the cottages along the channel for the use of the land. There were still 2 of the cottages remaining in the 1980s.

Several tree planting bees were held in April and May 1944 when about 5 acres of pine and spruce trees were set out. People using the park were encouraged to be careful of not only the trees that had been planted by the previous owner, but also the more recent plantings. It was pointed out that some of the trees were only 3 to 4 feet tall and some of their slender stems had already been cut off and used as roasting sticks.

Those who had helped with the tree plantings included: Paul Medbery, Fred Hulberg, William C. Schultz, Marvin Lipka, Junior Lipka, Tom King, Jerry King, Paul Kind, Wendell Lipka, Don & Jack Lipka, Jesse Hathorn and Robert Malamgren.

In the Spring of 1944, as part of a consolidation plan, the Coast Guard finally closed the station. All the heating and refrigeration equipment as well as all other moveable appliances were removed. The city of Montague and Whitehall had hoped that the Coast Guard Station would remain available and could be used as a community building or bathhouse in connection with the beach area. Or perhaps the Coast Guard would even return to utilize the building again. However, the Coast Guard chose instead to lease

the property to a private individual, thereby breaking the agreement that the government had with the Dowling Estate.

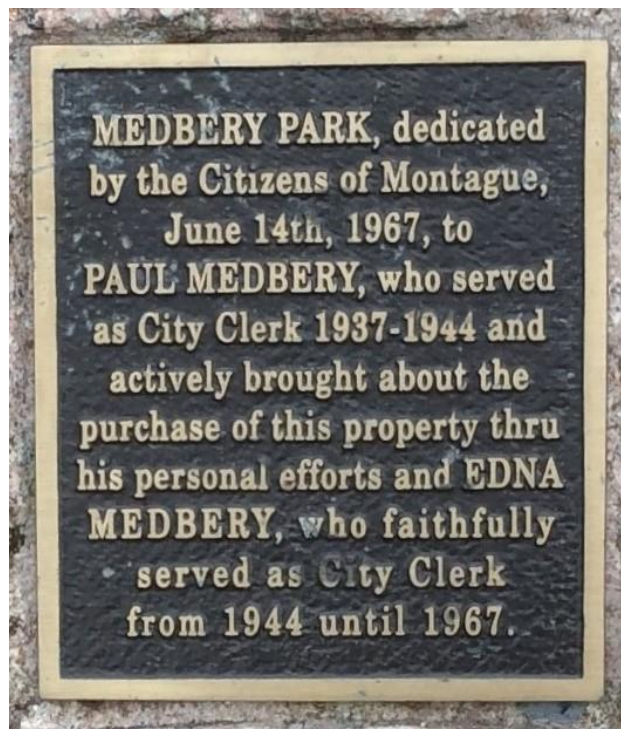
The Coast Guard Station became government surplus property and came under the War Surplus Property Act, which provided definite methods of disposal, chief of which was a sale by bid method. The station went up for sale in the Fall of 1946. As a stipulation of the sale, the building must be removed; therefore, the City of Montague decided not to put in a bid. So, the building was sold to a private individual. The owner then dismantled the outbuildings and moved a portion of the station to a new location in June 1947.

In 1948, the City of Montague wanted to sell the beach property to the State as they were unable to financially develop it as originally planned. A sale to the State would result in it still being used for public purposes. A vote was taken but the City retained ownership of the property as a 3/5th total of affirmative votes to sell was not reached.

In 1957, Hallard Grover obtained some of the property and built a house at the sight of the former lifesaving station. The house was there until around 1972 when it was torn down after the State bought him out.

In 1958, a wider entrance to the park was made with parking spaces available at the channel for fishermen and those enjoying a day at the beach.

In September 1967, a formal dedication of Medbery Park took place with the unveiling of a plaque mounted on a large boulder which had been placed in the park near the channel and the parking lot.



In 1991, a lease agreement for Medbery Park was completed between the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the City of Montague. The DNR had previously obtained about four acres of land which once made up the former Grover property and the former site of the Coast Guard Station. This property was added to the six-acre Medbery Park property. The city of Montague is leasing the land for free on a 10-year renewable lease.

Paul Medbery was born in East Troy, WI on October 9, 1869. He came to the Montague area from Chicago in the spring of 1927 and took a keen interest in the civic and social affairs of the city that he chose as his new home. He married local resident Edna Hulberg Grant on August 8, 1934. Edna was born in Montague in April 1894. Paul died in Montague on October 28, 1944, and Edna died in Whitehall on December 8, 1972.