The Secret – by Byron Preiss
(Bantam paperback, 1982)

Background on the book from http://thesecret.pbworks.com/w/page/22148559/FrontPage...

“Many armchair treasure hunt books have been published over the years, most notably Masquerade (1979) by British artist Kit Williams. Masquerade promised a jewel-encrusted golden hare to the first person to unravel the riddle that Williams cleverly hid in his art. In 1982, while everyone in Britain was still madly digging up hedgerows and pastures in search of the golden hare, The Secret: A Treasure Hunt was published in America. The previous year, author and publisher Byron Preiss had traveled to 12 locations in the continental U.S. (and possibly Canada) to secretly bury a dozen ceramic casques. Each casque contained a small key that could be redeemed for one of 12 jewels Preiss kept in a safe deposit box in New York. The key to finding the casques was to match one of 12 paintings to one of 12 poetic verses, solve the resulting riddle, and start digging. Since 1982, only two of the 12 casques have been recovered. The first was located in Grant Park, Chicago, in 1984 by a group of students. The second was unearthed in 2004 in Cleveland by two members of the Quest4Treasure forum. Preiss was killed in an auto accident in the summer of 2005, but the hunt for his casques continues.

The Secret is long out of print, but copies can be obtained easily online (try abebooks.com or bookfinder.com; the book was jointly authored by Sean Kelly, John Pierard, Byron Preiss, Ben Asen, John Jude Palencar, Ted Mann, JoEllen Trilling, and Overton Loyd). Most of the book has no connection whatsoever to the treasure hunt. Of primary importance are the 12 paintings and the 12 verses, as well as some front-end material that provides a back story.”
Twelve boxes (or “casques” as they were called) were buried, but only two have been found. The first one was discovered by a group of students in 1984, in Grant Park in Chicago. This is how it worked.

Where M and B are set in stone
And to Congress, R is known
L sits and left
Beyond his shoulder
Is the Fair Folks’
Treasure holder
The end of ten by thirteen
Is your clue
Fence and fixture
Central too
For finding jewel casque
Seek the sounds
Of rumble
Brush and music
Hush.
The verse describes various landmarks in the area of Grant Park.

Where M and B are set in stone

1 - The names of Mozart and Beethoven appear on the front of Symphony Hall.

And to Congress, R is known

2 - Roosevelt University on Congress Parkway

L sits and left

3 - Statue of Lincoln

Beyond his shoulder

4 Shows the position of the casque

“The end of ten by thirteen” referred to two lines of trees. “Fence and fixture” referred to this fencepost and wall fixture. The casque was apparently found between them. (That tree wasn’t there at the time.)
Several landmarks around Grant Park appeared disguised within the image, including the statue “Spirit of the Great Lakes”…

“The Bowman”…

The fencepost…
This is the picture and verse which are thought to relate to Florida:

The first chapter
Written in water
Near men
With wind rose
Behind bending branches
And a green picket fence
At the base of a tall tree
You can still hear the honking
Shell, limestone, silver, salt
Stars move by day
Sails pass by night
Even in darkness
Like moonlight in teardrops
Over the tall grass
Years pass, rain falls.
The first chapter
Written in water

“The First Chapter” appears on a sign at the entrance to the Fountain of Youth in St Augustine, Florida… (“Written in water”)…
…where we see Ponce de Leon, the character on horseback with his red flag.

Each image is associated with a nationality. This is known to be the Spanish image via a system of correspondences explained in the book’s introduction…

September
Aster (birth flower)
Sapphire (birth stone)

…and the couplet…

“The Hadas of Iberia
Sapphire, shy as a wild field flower”

…Ponce de Leon being a Spanish conquistador.

The introduction also includes the clue:

“For slow centuries, the exotic Dracs and Fadas from the Riviera had sported and dozed on the beaches of new-found Florida. Perhaps the metal-clashing landfall of the Conquistadores took them by surprise and they fled without taking time to disenchant their Fountain of Youth.”

The verse continues…

Near men
With wind rose
The Fountain of Youth has a planetarium with a ship theme. The “men with wind-rose” is a reference to a sign here…

Behind bending branches
And a green picket fence
At the base of a tall tree

There are various green picket fences at the Fountain of Youth. The “tall tree” may refer to Magnolia Ave which runs alongside it, which has plenty of “bending branches” and a small stretch of green picket fence.
You can still hear the honking

There used to be geese at the Fountain of Youth.

*Shell, limestone, silver, salt*

These words appear on signs here. The “silver salt” reference is to a “silver salt cellar” associated with Ponce de Leon and described on the sign as a “casque”, the word used in the book for the hidden boxes.
Stars move by day
Sails pass by night
Even in darkness

This is another reference to the planetarium with the “wind-rose”. The inside of the planetarium is decked out like a sailing ship.
Like moonlight in teardrops

It’s not clear what this means. Perhaps it could be:

Like moonlight – silver
In teardrops – salt

…another reference to the “silver salt” / “casque” sign.

Over the tall grass

Could be a literal description of the casque site

Years pass, rain falls.

The years that pass are the years of youth, the rain that falls is the fountain…Fountain of Youth.

The white rock in the image resembles the section of coastline by the park…
The puzzles usually seem to include something that can be seen from the spot where the casque is buried. Perhaps this is the cannon at the bottom of Magnolia Ave which runs alongside FOY, “at the base of a tall tree”…?

Several elements in the picture resemble the unusual curving wall of the Fountain of Youth in Magnolia Ave, made of oyster shells. (Cf “Shell, limestone”…also, “Written in water” is associated with Shelley.)
This is what was hidden, buried up to 3ft deep in a plastic container.

There’s an article about the Cleveland discovery here:

http://www.angelfire.com/dragon/egbert/secret.html

Here’s an article about the Grant Park discovery, though it’s not entirely accurate…
Hunting by the book

Chicago Tribune, 8/9/83, Sec. 2, pg. 1

Chicago pals unearth 'Secret' treasure

By Eric Zorn

WHEN BYRON PREISS wrote his book 'The Secret' last year, he was counting on there being a few more people like Bob Wrobel, Eric Gasiorowski and David James in this world: people who would throw themselves wholeheartedly into a wildly difficult, nationwide hunt for buried treasure.

Preiss buried 12 ceramic casks in the far reaches of the 48 states and planted a host of clues to their whereabouts in a Bantam paperback published last fall. He expected the first treasure to be found within 30 days. The months rolled by, and no one cracked any of the puzzles. Some 700 people wrote to Preiss at his New York office claiming to have located the treasure. None had.

Then, early in the evening of one of Chicago's hottest summer days, Wrobel, Gasiorowski and James took a shovel, the book, a map and a few friends to an obscure corner of Grant Park and completed a six-month search by digging up the first of the ceramic casks.

In return for their travail, the suburban teenagers get to keep the cask, valued at more than $500, and will receive an emerald worth approximately $1,000. The remainder of the jewels will continue to gather dust in a New York City vault until the casks that go along with them are unearthed.

The Chicago treasure would still be in the ground had not a feature story about 'The Secret' appeared in The Tribune late last year and inspired Wrobel, 19, to buy the book as a birthday present for James, now 18. The two knew each other from Walther Lutheran High School in Melrose Park and were part of a small circle of friends that played 'Dungeons and Dragons,' an elaborate fantasy game favored by those with high intelligence and a somewhat obsessive, escapist nature.

THE HUNT BEGAN for the young men in February when Gasiorowski, 16, the third member of the plucky trio, bought his own copy of the book. They were confronted with a confounding set of clues that at first seemed to make no sense whatsoever.

"'The Secret" was an attempt by the author to duplicate the success of "Masquerade," a 1979 British book that combined a fairy tale with a

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Eric Gasiorowski [left] and Bob Wrobel used clues in 'The Secret' to find a $1,500 treasure in Grant Park.
Tough 'Secret' clues lead Chicago trio

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real treasure hunt and captured the international imagination. In the American version, Press plennted hints in paintings and poems that helped comprise an elaborate, humorous folk tale about "The Fair People," immigrant elves and gnomes.

The book has not been as successful as its European counterpart. One reason is the chilly reception accorded "The Secret" by critics. Another may be that there are so many different treasures to look for, no one of them is as tempting as the single $50,000 bonanza of "Masquerade." A third reason may be that the puzzles themselves are very hard.

The key to the Chicago treasure, for example, was recognizing lesser-known or disguised area landmarks sprinkled through one of 12 thoroughly bizarre paintings and matching those clues with the following poem in a series of poems:

Where M and B are set in stone
And to Congress, R is known
L sits and left
Beyond his shoulder
Is the Fair Folks'
Treasure holder
The end of ten by thirteen
Is your clue
Pence and fixture

Chicago Tribune, 8/9/83, Sec. 2, pg. 3(1)

IO to a treasure buried in Grant Park

long ride in from the western suburbs and dug five holes in the frozen tundra. No luck. They were sure they had the spot, so they sent off a letter to Press to ask if they were close or if, perchance, it had already been found.

Months passed. The letter never reached Press, and in waiting around for a response the boys practically forgot about their search. Finally in early July they called Press' office long distance. His secretary said there was no treasure buried in Chicago. But the boys were sure.

They called back the next day and asked to speak with him personally. They explained their reasoning in solving his riddles and told him where they were digging.

"You have the answer," he told them. "I don't see why you can't find the right spot."

SOMETIMES DURING the winter of 1981-82, Press dressed in a modest, blue-collar disguise, had crept into Grant Park and planted the ceramic cask, protected by a plastic box, in a woodsy, secluded area a few feet from a cement retaining wall that runs next to Jackson Drive and close to a link fence that keeps the bums off the railroad tracks. The area now is pitted with reminders of the many holes that Wrobel, Gasiorowski and James chewed into the sod in July.

They were never once stopped by the police, though Gasiorowski says he once had to hide inside a hole he was digging to avoid the gendarmes, and all three attracted frequent attention from curious passers-by who wondered just what these guys thought they were doing playing gopher on public property.

All they found on their digs were underground pipes. They called Press again to beg for the last little clue, which he finally sent them in the form of a snapshot taken at the burial site. The placement of the scarred earth in that picture was the last piece to the puzzle.

So, filled with a sense of celebration and anticipation, Wrobel, Gasiorowski, his mother and sister, some neighbors, a photographer and a lookout [James, alas, was visiting his grandparents in Indiana] trooped down town one last time to claim their reward. Once again they pierced the crumbly Chicago soil with their shovel. Once again they dug deep: One foot. Two feet. Three feet. Once again they found nothing.

DANNY ROSENBACH, a friend and bit player in the drama, was standing in a hole wondering what could have gone wrong when he stepped back and knocked over some dirt off the crater wall. Suddenly, on the southern face of the hole, there it was—the secret exposed.

"We went nuts," says Wrobel.

They're not quite sure what they're going to do with the money. Maybe they'll invest it until James finishes his upcoming hitch in the Army. Maybe they'll just split it three ways and be done with the whole affair.

But maybe they'll use some of it to finance another treasure hunt. "We've almost got another one figured out," says Gasiorowski coyly. "It's in Colorado. We've narrowed it down to a four-block area.

Chicago Tribune, 8/9/83, Sec. 2, pg. 3(2)