

Story of Parks and Cemeteries
By Mr. H. Lee Bancroft, Superintendent
December 1949

It is not too difficult to picture Lansing's Park System 50 years ago for I can remember there were only two parks and I remember both of them well.

Third Ward, alias Central Park and now officially named Reutter Park in honor of one of Lansing's good mayors, came to the City from the State in 1878 and like many of our streets was over planted with trees. Trees were planted closely along both sides of the walk around the outside of the park and along the walks which crossed from corner to corner and the center of the four sections which resulted were planted to nursery stock and a tulip tree and three English elms have matured and still adorn the west section of the park. The trees have matured over the years and required many removals to preserve the better trees in this little down town park, and the fountain given by Mr. Reutter in memory of his wife has added an interesting and popular attraction but the essential character of the park has remained essentially unchanged and the trees in their maturity are considered of far greater value today than any landscaped park development.

Oak Park, which was the only other park property in 1900 was originally purchased in 1852 as a City Cemetery and was developed and so used for over 25 years.

I am not familiar with all of the facts that lead to the transfer of the whole cemetery to the present Mt. Hope Cemetery but lot owners exchanged lots in the old cemetery for their choice of similar lots in Mt. Hope and for a period of years removals were made until the little cemetery was completely abandoned. This is one of the few cases on record of the transfer of burial rights, burials, monuments and markers on such a wholesale basis and evidently the work was not completed without argument and at times it was evidently necessary for help from the court.

So in 1900 the old cemetery property had been designated as a park and was known as East Side Park or the Fifth Ward Park but still in evidence were the circular drives from Dorrance Place around to Mesher Place and on around to Saginaw St. Marker and monument foundations were still in evidence with remnants of curbing and depressed walkways.

Cupped in between the two sand ridges which makes up the land area was a flat area on the south and a small lake on the north. Many changes have come about, the flat land has been graded out and backstops installed and the lake has been excavated, and the entire bottom paved but where a few children waded in the deep muck of the lake, thousands now wade in the same spot. The lake in 1900 had been decorated with a couple of big cast iron fountains which spurted water up in a column at the center and then dropped in a succession of bowls from the small one at the top to the large one at the base from which it dripped into the lake. These huge cast iron bowls became favorite spots from which children dived into the dirty or mucky water and the fountains later had to be removed. Water to the fountains was fed in from the north end of the lake where some one had built an elaborate and rather ingenious concrete tank in which water was kept flowing thruout the year to protect the fish over the winter season. I have seen a sketch of the pool and fountains drawn up by an early city engineer and it was probably considered pretty snappy in its day.

Just north of the lake was a weeping Camperdown Elm which once graced the Cemetery and which survived for many years until its tears must have dried up for what had once been called 'God's Acre' now resounded to the joyous shouts of children splashing in the lake.

To the south of the lake was the field where we gathered after school and on a Saturday to choose up for a base ball or a foot ball game. Here we gave ground grudgingly to the older boys, spoke in whispers of the prowess of 'Doggy' Marsh, 'Chuck' Ashley, Bob Ferguson and others and then tried to duplicate their foot ball style. It was here with 'Puss' Shields, Walter Madk Maynard Wise, the Rominsky boys, the Marklewitz brothers, Billy Siegrist, the Urganysks, Sieberts and others that I first remember seeing forward passes thrown with a football. The passes were slid out from the quarterback on a long underhand lateral, passed with both hands over the line or thrown by a half back on an underhand spiral, the ball being too big to grasp for an overhand pass.

We skated on the lake and coasted on the hills in winter until we were blue and we dug in the sand banks and at one time I remember that an old burial was unearthed and the police took over and arranged for reinterment at Mt. Hope.

Around 1910, a stone crushing plant was built on the west railroad boundary hill and thousands of yards of stone were hauled from surrounding territory by the farmers during the winter months and a huge pile of stone occupied the west side of the park.

In 1911 the first tree surgery was done in the park and several of the oaks were filled with layered concrete with asphalt dividing strips which I believe was about the first work of this type done in this section of the country using the Davey system.

In 1914 the present Rest House was completed. In 1915 the Lansing Playgrounds Association prevailed on the City to operate its first supervised playground and Oak Park or East Side Park was the first supervised park playground.

During Ald. O.C. Howe and William Britten's time the City purchased land adjoining Oak Park and extending to Shiawassee Street on which the City Greenhouse trial garden and storage garages were built. This past year a much needed building was erected on the Shiawassee Street frontage housing the machine shop, offices, employees room, toilets and heated storage garage.

Oak Park has served the community just 2 years short of a century and drastic and unthinkable as such a move would be considered today under present City Planning the removal of the City Cemetery has provided a park in which thousands upon thousands of children and adults have found pleasure, health and recreation which I am sure would be accepted as payment in full by those who gave up their resting place that others might enjoy the benefits of a more abundant life here on earth.

This should be the end of the story and it is interesting to note that in 1900, the City had purchased and developed Mt. Hope Cemetery, had completed removals from Oak Park and gone definitely into the municipal cemetery service to the community and 50 years ago had served the City for 27 years on the beautiful high lands along the Sycamore. The development of Mt. Hope, the provisions made for Perpetual Care and maintenance and the final move in adding the Perpetual Care Cemetery which is called Evergreen Cemetery is a story in itself and covers a span of 77 years of service to citizens of this community. The foresight of those men who were responsible for the City taking on this service and for the unselfish devotion of many public spirited men who served as members of the Cemetery Board and later as members of the Cemetery and Park Board should be highly commended and their names honored in our City.

While we have gone into some detail in describing the 2 parks of 1900 and their growth many other developments were taking place in the park program.

In 1908 J. Henry Moores in thanks for the support of his friends in Lansing during a trying period in his life, decided to develop and beautify a park along the Grand River and preserve the beauty of the unusual stand of trees in what was then known as Belvedere Park. To that end he gave unsparingly of his time and supervised the development of the park personally. His sentiment was expressed in a bronze plaque at the entrance to Moores Park. "I shall pass this way but once, therefore any good that I may do let me do it now for I shall not pass this way again." Suffice it to say that Mr. Moores gift was freely and well given. At later dates additions were made to the park as its use was enjoyed by the public and on his death the City became the beneficiary of part of his estate which provided among other things for the gift of Frances Park and Moores River Drive and for funds which resulted in the building of the swimming pool at Moores Park and for a trust fund to develop Frances Park.
(1922-2-2-?)

J. H. Moores was truly the father of Lansing's Park System and his enthusiasm was contagious. A small park in the north end with a beautiful picnic grove was willed to the City and named Reasoner Park in 1913. Shortly after this J. W. Potter a friend of Mr. Moores offered the City a part of what is now Potter Park. A special committee was named to plan the park development with Mr. Moores as chairman. Serving as members of the committee were such men as Richard Scott, Gottlieb Reutter and Hugh Lundberg. It is interesting to note that Mr. Scott in 1929 gave Scott Playgrounds to the City and money for its development. Mr. Reutter later built and dedicated the Reutter Electric Fountain at the park named in his honor and Hugo Lundberg has given the best years of his life in service to his City as a member of the Cemetery and Park Board and later as a member of the Water and Light Board of which he is now president.

The public acceptance and use of Potter Park was so enthusiastic that Mr. Potter followed his first gift with a second and later provided funds which made possible the building of the Potter Park Pavilion. Shortly after Mr. Potter's gift the elk which had been located at Moores Park was transferred to Potter Park and the gift of a bear and a pair of raccoon set up the Zoo which has developed over the years at Potter Park.

In 1917 Dr. George Ranney left the City a 20 acre tract of land lying between E. Michigan Avenue and Grand River and a portion of his estate to be used for its development and maintenance. Dr. Ranney's will is a master piece and in it he cited the reasons for his interest in providing facilities for the development of healthy bodies and physical recreation. 'Ranney Playfield' has been developed and largely financed thru the generosity and foresight of this pioneer advocate of recreation parks.

In 1918 Smith Young, an admirer of J. H. Moores, purchased some very desirable river frontage at the south end of Logan St. Bridge and west along Moores River Drive and with the addition of funds from the River Drive Assn. and the Country Club, secured and donated to the City the area now known as Riverside Park.

In the same year William Trager, an alderman and member of the Cemetery and Park Board purchased and dedicated a small park just west of the entrance to Potter Park which was greatly appreciated because of its strategic location.

The death of Mark Clifford in 1920 left the City with two pieces of property one known as Clifford Park on Mt. Hope Avenue and the second the property now used as Foster Playgrounds at Foster and Kalamazoo.

In the same year 1920, Lansing had an outstanding gift from William C. Durant. The voters had turned down a proposal to purchase the Cowles property at the corner of Saginaw and Washington Ave. as too expensive but Mr. Durant in company with Oscar Downey had visited the property and Mr. Durant became so enthused at the possibilities of the park that he purchased the land, cleared off the property, developed the park and gave it to the City who promptly accepted, erected the

entrance arch and named in Mr. Durant's honor. It is a beautiful and desirable park property.

Bandcroft Park was acquired the same year with a partial grant from the owners and was named in their honor, and the acceptance of a plat brought in a portion of the land now known as Quentin Park. This park was later added to by purchase from Motor Wheel Corporation and developed thru W.P.A. funds. During the period when Quentin Park was being constructed over 30 homes were started in this section and property which had been considered exceptionally undesirable became a very desirable section and resulted later in the housing development on the west and south of the park. Parks stabilize undeveloped real estate properties.

The west block of Ferris Park was developed in 1921 by permission of the State and so improved the property that the cow was moved off the east block and the land filled and graded as a play area which serves the schools and the neighborhood well. We hope it is never used otherwise.

In 1922 the City acquired the Tourist Camp on East Michigan and built the camp building. The area served the Tourists during the days when they travelled with tents and light trailers, accommodated many tourists visiting the Capitol and local automobile plants for car deliveries but gradually deteriorated until it was serving peddlers, travelling hobos, gypsy groups and families who lived in trailers and were in no sense tourists. The camp was finally closed and the building and grounds are now used in connection with the municipal ball park and other recreational used will be developed here in the future under a new lease with the State in 1949.

In 1922 the City purchased Evergreen Cemetery and the following year accepted a 100 year lease from the State for a part of the land now used as Groesbeck Golf Course and for the land just east of Wood St. on Grand River. The development of the Groesbeck municipal golf course proved very popular and financed the development of the Red Cedar course which was acquired four years later as a part of the Michigan Avenue Boulevard development, as suggested in Bartholomew's first City Plan, and included in it is the site of the present lighted Municipal Ball Park and some very desirable river frontage along the Cedar.

Following the recommendations of Bartholomew in his City Plan Report of 1922 the Park Board started acquiring the river frontage on the north side of the Grand River west of Logan Street bridge and by 1927 had acquired the land between the Grand Trunk right of way and the Grand River west to the City Limits. The river front program was fittingly completed nearly twenty years later in 1945 when R.E. Olds acquired the Dr. Gregory acreage just west of the City limits and gave it together with his own river frontage to the west as a gift to the City on his 80th birthday. The gift of approximately 39 acres fittingly completed a long range program in which the City has acquired practical control of both banks of the Grand River from the County line bridge nearly to the Washington Ave Bridge except for two restricted subdivision properties and a short run of county road and downtown property near Elm Street.

In 1924 the City purchased the Reo Ball Park now Sycamore Ball Park, on South Pennsylvania Ave. south of the Cedar River and accepted land from Col. Fred E. Shubel along the south bank of the Cedar River to Lindberg Drive and acreage along the Sycamore Creek which was later named Shubel Park in his honor. It is unfortunate that Col. Shubel could not have lived to see the development of the Sycamore Park Subdivision and the new school of which he dreamed and equally unfortunate for the City that he died during the depression years following 1929 and that his fortune was

wiped out and with it a generous bequest to the City for park purposes. We regret that this public spirited citizen could not have lived to enjoy the results of his good work which has meant so much in the development of this whole park area.

In 1931 the Recreation movement was in full swing and the City developed two new ball fields at Saginaw and Marshall Street on State land and called Marshall Field. Later a gift of land from the Motor Wheel Corporation and the purchase of dump property provided another field on Saginaw St. known as the West Marshall Field.

Concentration of facilities on the west side of the City now came in for correction and with the help of the West Side Improvement Association twenty acres of land was leased from the Federal Screw Company at W. Saginaw and Stanley St and developed into an athletic field in 1932 and finally purchased by the City in 1940.

In 1935 a refuse dump on the bend of the Red Cedar at Elm Street was purchased from the New York Central and graded and improved during W.P.A. days into one of the City's best soft ball parks. Plans for continuing the acquisition of additional river frontage north of Elm Street around to the River Street bridge were developed again by Richard Scott and he personally acquired land which was to be given with other properties but the plan failed and it was some years later before the City acquired this addition to the Elm Street Park's river frontage.

In 1935 another City Plan recommendation was carried out in the leasing of a part of the State's School for the Blind farm land at the corner of Princeton and Daleford. Again the land was developed under W.P.A. programs, a building erected, two soft ball fields built and named in honor of the late Governor Comstock. This park area was badly needed and has proven a very popular and desirable addition to our neighborhood parks. Within the past year 4 tennis courts have been added to the park facilities.

In 1937 land was purchased next to the Logan Street School and additional purchases in 1940 and 1945 were made in co-operation with the Board of Education in the development of the Lincoln Community Center and further purchases are contemplated in developing enough room to adequately serve this rather congested area.

In 1938 E.H. Cooley left his home and beautiful grounds to the City at Main and Townsend Streets. The present Cooley Gardens was developed here with the help of W.P.A. and a very welcome and generous donation from the family.

In the same year the City purchased from the Motor Wheel Corporation, land at Pattengill and Barnes Avenue which was added to a small park on the plat and after a Herculean wheelbarrow job by W.P.A., developed into what is now known as Quentin Park. The development of the park marked the turning point in the development of this whole southwest section. Thirty four new homes were erected in this area during the development of the park and of course later the housing development around this park area brought in a great many more. It is interesting to note that an area which had just missed being classed as undesirable for home building turned about and became a growing section of good homes. We think the park did it.

In 1939 the City made one of its major park purchases when the 120 acre property between Saginaw St. and Michigan Ave. on Waverly Road was acquired for the development of a municipal golf course and park for the west section of the City. The land was purchased by the City for \$40,000 dollars and the development and construction of the golf course with the buildings, rock well, roads, water mains and drainage was all financed thru accrued funds from the Forest Park Library and Archives - Capital Area District Libraries

is three other municipal golf courses. The golf funds were used to match A. labor and marked the last major park improvement program in which the participated.

Remarkable good use had been made of relief labor during the depression notably the dredging and widening of the Cedar River thru the Potter Park-el Park district, the building of the present Aviary and barns at the Zoo, the moats and monkey mountain, river revetment work along the Cedar river, tin Park, Comstock Park, Cemetery improvements, river bank plantings, ay Garden, garage buildings, water mains, drains and many other improvements made during this period in which gave gainful employment when it was most ed and has added a long list of public improvements which are now used enjoyed by the public.

It should also be noted that work performed during the first years of depression, in our case at least, was extremely productive, satisfactory and pered but that in the concluding days of the work programs the work locally e so involved in rules, regulations and red tape that it became extremely cult to make enough progress to warrant the voluminous reports required.

In 1939 the Park Board took over the 60 acres which is now Grand Woods Camp, ed west of the City on Willow Street, from the Garbage Department where it een used as a part of what was called the Hog Farm. Rather than sell this etive property which lies along the Grand River the Board secured its use from ity Council and by great good fortune secured the co-operation of the -Roebuck Company in building an attractive lodge on the property which was given to the City. The facilities are limited but have been used muously and successfully since its inception by playground children, Boy s and Girl Scouts for day camping and by scheduled groups for meetings, y reunions and picnics when available and at a small fee for the use of ities and equipment.

In 1940 Mr. and Mrs. Christian Stabler gave a play field to the City in r of their son and after the land had been partially developed were so pleased with the development that additional land was given and funds for urchase of play equipment. A park building was completed on the area about ars ago providing facilities for the lighted skating rink in the winter and ll field and playgrounds in the summer.

In 1941 the City purchased at a reduced figure the old Hunter gravel pit ty at Kalamazoo and Holmes. The property was used for a public dump for a of years until the 50 foot pit had been brought up to grade and has been ly filled and graded for the development of a recreation field. By purchase change the City has added to the original acreage and will develop a picnic ith tables and facilities for a neighborhood park in this very desirable on. The park is not completed and sewers, drains, water lines and sanitary ties and landscaping are needed.

In 1942 the City purchased the land on south Washington Avenue, known as o proving grounds in order to provide protection for the Greencroft Plat rk facilities at the south city limits. The property has not been developed e but a large drain has been completed this month which it is hoped will t excessive flooding in the area. The 40 acre tract is well wooded and tive, provides a buffer from the railroad and industrial development to rth and will undoubtedly prove a valuable addition to the park system because extension of the city limits to the south.

After the School Board had purchased the wooded area on West Michigan Ave Belt Line railroad for the new Sexton High School the Park Board was i to give up this area which had been designated as a Capital Area District in the Forest Park Library and Archives Capital Area District Library

City Plan. Appreciating the mutual advantage of developing a park area next to the school property, a twenty acre strip of property was purchased from the McPhersons which extends from St. Joe Street north along the Belt Line to the Sexton High School property. The St. Joe frontage is being filled in rapidly and a battery of tennis courts, a baseball field and a soft ball field have been built at the north end of the property. The park will provide a green belt along the railroad protecting the residential area, a dual use of tennis courts and fields with the High School participating and an attractive open area for the use of the neighborhood.

A similar situation has been developed in the extreme north section of the City where land has been acquired thru the gift of Mrs. Joseph Coleman and thru the exchange of properties of a new park which will be known as the Burton S. Gier park comprising about 40 acres and adjoining the Thomas Street School property which will be developed as a Junior High School. Some improvements have been made but development will have to be geared to finances and the needs of the community in this north section:

Another rather unusual park development has resulted from the expressed need of the Olds Motor Works for the property presented to the City by Mr. Scott for a playground at the foot of Townsend Street. In 1945 after a number of careful surveys an exchange of properties was advocated and approved by the Olds, the City Council, the Cemetery and Park Board and by popular vote in which the original Scott property was exchanged for land directly south of Cooley Garden extending from Townsend St. to the Grand River and including the Barnes Home and grounds facing Main St. and the Jenison Home on Townsend. The exchange has been completed and the Scott Playground Building and all the equipment moved onto the new location and is now in use. The Barnes property was leased to the State as the site for a governor's home and residence in Lansing and the Jenison home has been held until funds are available for its improvement and alteration to serve the garden clubs, hobby clubs and adult social groups affiliated with the Recreation Department. The grounds are being improved and landscaped to provide a link between the gardens on the north and the playgrounds to the south.

While there are a great number of small areas, subdivision parks and triangles, tax lots acquired for public use and miscellaneous areas used for nurseries, gardens, service yards, wood yards, dumps and land for future development, the more important areas in Lansing's Park Recreation and Cemetery program have been covered briefly. It will be noted that Lansing has had many gifts from the pioneers of this beautiful city, that the City has filled in by purchase to provide park for the areas which have not been served by donations, that insofar as possible and advisable the City has followed the thinking and recommendations of the City Plan and have maintained a standard advocated by park and recreation authorities of 1 acre of land to a hundred in population and so located as to serve the neighborhoods and the children of the neighborhood in each section of the City.

The parks and cemeteries of Lansing are well over 1200 acres and together with a street shade tree program and a year around recreation program are operated under the supervision of the Board of Cemetery and Park Commissioners.

(over)



WILLIAM J. ATCHISON

Born January 1, 1889 in Richmond, Kansas. Moved to Lansing in 1902.

Graduated from Lansing Central High School in 1906.

Moved to Panama in 1907 to help his father who was a field representative for International Correspondence School.

Lived in Panama for 5 years.

Moved to Lansing in 1912 and entered Michigan Agricultural College (M.S.U.) graduating in 1916 with a B.S. degree in Landscape.

Moved to Muskegon in 1916 and taught Botany in the high school and was also in charge of children's gardening in the grade schools.

In 1920 he went into business on his own with a small nursery. Most of his work was in the Lansing and Flint areas.

While in college Mr. J. Henry Moores hired him to do all of the tree trimming in Moores Park. This led to another job of trimming the trees in Central Park (Reutter) by Mr. Bancroft.

The layout of Moores Park and Durant Park were also done by Bill on a contract basis of \$150.00 per month.

In 1928 he laid out Evergreen Cemetery and Sections A and B. When this was finished he was asked if he would be the Sexton of Evergreen but Bill turned it down as his landscape business was flourishing.

In 1934, Mr. Bancroft asked Bill to make plans for Frances Park which were used years later when the park was developed.

Finally in 1935 Bill was persuaded to join the city as Landscape Architect.

Retired in 1959.

OAK PARK

This property was purchased for \$400.00 from James and Horatio Seymour and their wives and was deeded to the Town of Lansing December 1, 1851, and recorded November 9, 1852. It was used and known as the City Cemetery. As the City grew and the Cemetery became crowded, bodies were removed starting in 1873 to a new place now known as Mt. Hope Cemetery. Lot owners exchanged lots in the old Cemetery for their choice of similar lots in the new location. The City paid for all removal expense. This was one of the few cases in the Country where such a wholesale removal program has been made. All of this work was not completed without arguments and at times it was necessary for help from the Courts.

So in 1900 the old cemetery property was designated as a park and was known as East Side Park. Later it was changed to Fifth Ward Park and finally to its present name of Oak Park.

Cupped in between the two sand ridges which makes up the land area was a flat area on the south and a small lake on the north. The lake was in time excavated and the entire bottom paved.

About 1910, a stone crushing plant was built on the west railroad boundary hill and thousands of yards of stones were hauled from surrounding areas by the farmers during the winter months.

In 1911 the first tree surgery was done in the Park and several of the Oaks were filled with layered concrete and asphalt dividing strips.

In 1914 the present resthouse was completed. It was remodeled into a Neighborhood Drop In Center in 1968.

In 1915 the Lansing Playgrounds Association prevailed on the City to operate its first supervised playground.

Eventually more land was purchased to the south on which the City Greenhouse and storage garages were built. In 1948 a building was erected

on the Shiawassee Street frontage which was the beginning of the present City Field Office.

In 1922 Mrs. Kittie C. Thomas donated playground equipment to the Park in memory of her husband J. C. Thomas. A plaque with the above information is located on the north side of the tennis courts.

For many years a city greenhouse was located in this Park. It was demolished in 1966 and relocated at Shubel Park on East Mt. Hope Avenue.

A property description in 1931 described the property as "all that certain piece or parcel of land in the City of Lansing known as part of Sec. 15 in town 4 north of range 2 west according to the U. S. Survey and bounded as follows. Beginning at a point 89 links south of the northwest corner thereof and running thence south 14 chains and 11 links thence east 14 chains and 18 links, thence north 14 chains and 11 links, thence west 14 chains and 12 links to the place of beginning".

NOTE: In the United States Public Surveys, Gunthers Chain is used and it is the standard in legal documents.

A "chain" is 4 rods or 66 feet.

A "link" is 7.92 inches.

Acres 18.3

Facilities

- Tennis Courts
- Playground equipment
- Restrooms
- Drop In Center
- Basketball Courts
- Horseshoe Courts
- Tetherball Court
- Picnic Area
- Softball field with backstop
- Ice rink w/warming shelter
- Summer playground program
- Sliding hill

REUTTER PARK

Donated to the City on May 9, 1878 by the State of Michigan.

It was first called Third Ward Park. In 1927 the name was changed to Central Park and then in 1944, it was changed to Reutter Park in honor of J. Gottlieb and Mary Reutter.

The fountain, which was designed by Mr. Claud Erickson was given to the City in 1929 by Mr. Reutter in honor of his wife Mary.

Mr. Reutter was an immigrant from Stammheim, Germany and worked as a butcher. When Reutter shrugged off the Mayoral cloak in 1918, he entered the real estate business at a time when the greatest state of the City's growth was about to start. Reutter started it*.

Mr. Charles H. Davis, Secretary of the Lansing Chamber of Commerce, helped Mr. Reutter close the deal for the property where the present Fisher Body Plant now stands.

Mr. Reutter served on the Police and Fire Board for 23 years.

During his second term as Mayor, a group of business men holding the garbage disposal contract for the City wanted out. He called together several Aldermen who went along with him on a \$2,500 note to buy pigs and garbage cans. That was the start of a thriving piggery that made money for the City on the grounds now occupied by Grand Woods Park*.

In 1914, the Park and Cemetery Board marched into the office of Mayor Reutter and demanded a "qualified Forester" to manage the growing park system, Reutter looked around persuaded H. Lee Bancroft to take the job*.

During the years of development of Potter Park, Mr. Reutter served on the committee for its development.

*City in The Forest - Birt Darling

TOWNSEND STREET


KALAMAZOO STREET

REUTTER PARK

CAPITOL AVENUE

LENAWEE STREET

REUTTER PARK

NORTH 

0 25 50 100
SCALE IN FEET

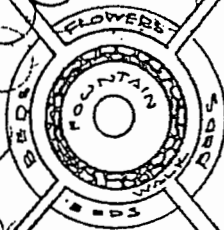
PARKING RAMP

KALAMAZOO AVE.

240' 200' 100' 50'

CAPITOL AVE.

LENAWEE AVE.



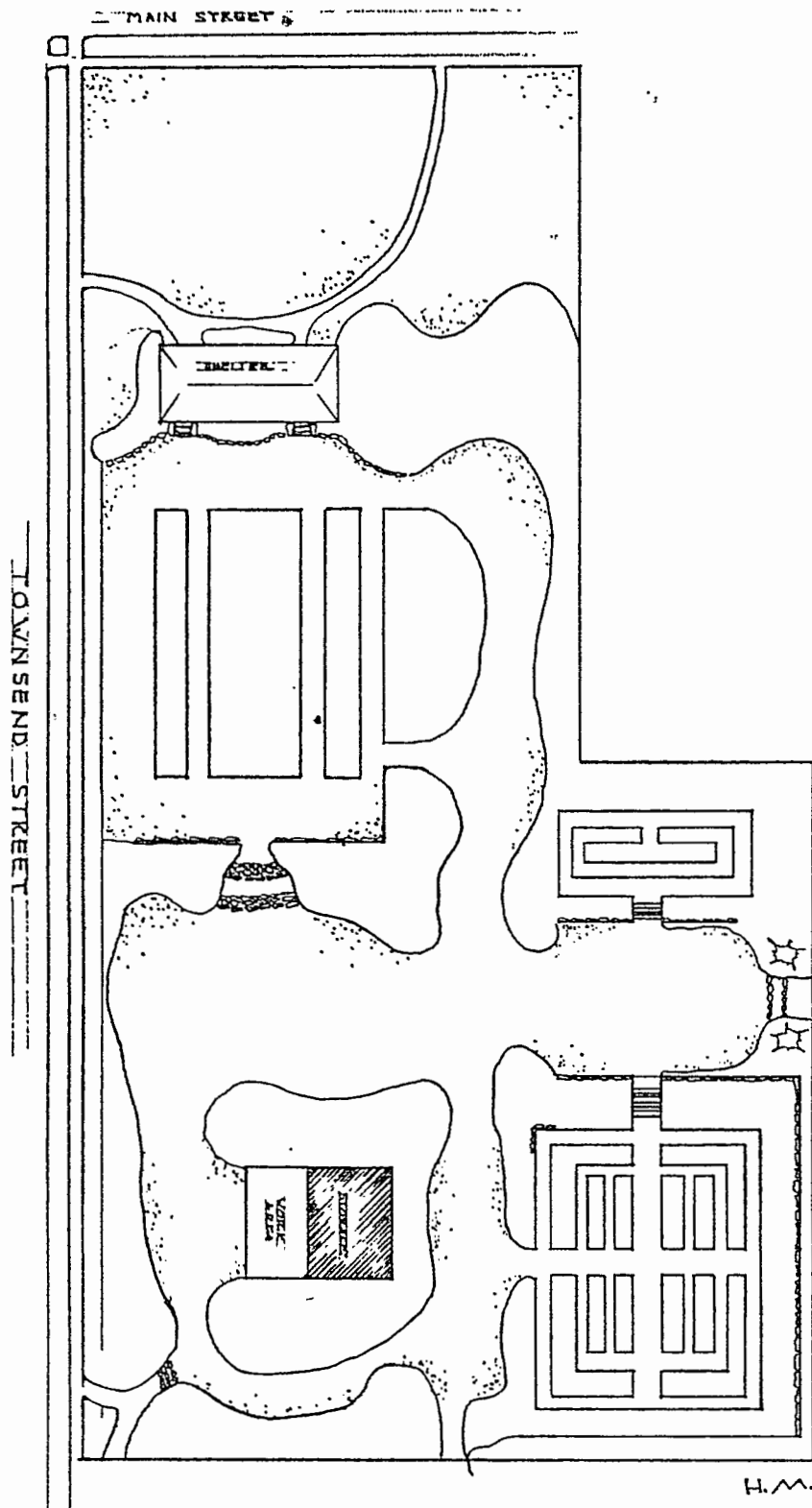
130'



SCALE 1" = 100'

REUTER PARK

12-1-67

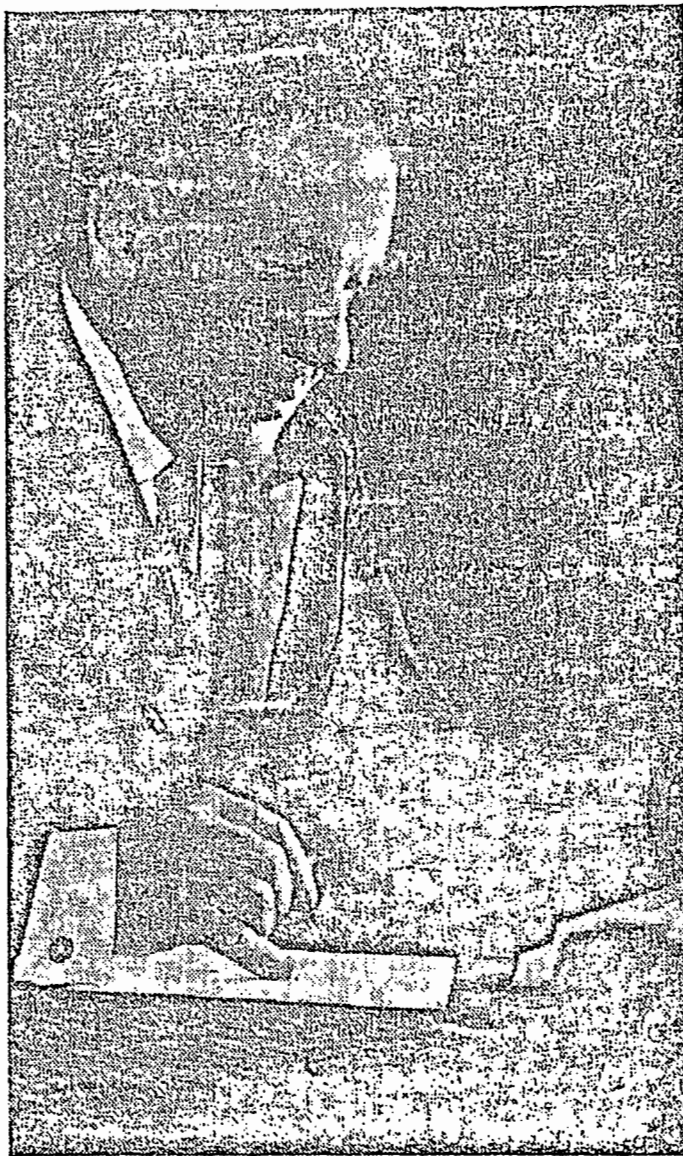


SCALE 1" = 30'

COOLEY GARDENS

Forest Parke Library and Archives - Capital Area District Libraries

9,2067



William C. Durant At His Desk

DURANT PARK

Durant Park was named after William C. Durant. He was one of the most fabulous of the "Idea Men". He had a world of daring and was often called a plunger by his enemies. Mr. Durant became known as the "Godfather of the automobile industry". Durant organized General Motors in 1908 and Chevrolet Motor Co. in 1915. He lost control of both in 1920. He organized Durant Motors in Lansing in 1921. Today the bodies roll off the assembly lines, not for silly's Durants and Stars, but for oldsmobiles. He was born in Boston, Mass. in 1861 and grew up in Flint and died in New York City in 1947 of the age of 85.

The Frederick Mortimer Cowles house was located on 713 North Washington Ave. Mr. Cowles was a traveling agent for the E. Bement & Son Co. selling agricultural implements and then in 1891 with the Lansing Wagon works. Mr. Cowles died in 1899. Mrs. Cowles lived here for a few years. After her death

two of the Cowles spinster daughters continued to live here. The property was neglected and over-run with vines and shrubs and trees grew wild and so for about six years it was known as the haunted house.

The city tried to purchase the property several times for park use but was always defeated by a small margin due to the opposition of the people in the outlying sections of the city.

Mr. Durant with a business man's vision into the future realized the mistake the people were making, called Mr. Charles P. Downey, his brother-in-law to see what could be done to save the property before it was sold to some real estate firm. So in 1919, Mr. Downey approached J. Gottlieb Reutter and asked him to purchase the entire block. Mr. Downey gave Mr. Reutter a \$2,500 check as a deposit. Another real estate man had been trying to sell the entire block in separate lots. One lot had been sold at this time. Finally the entire block was purchased for \$100,000 for Mr. Durant. He spent over \$30,000 tearing down the Cowles house, leveling the ground and planting trees and putting in a fountain.*

The transfer of the property was kept a secret until the property was turned over to the city in its completed condition in 1920.

The park is on the highest point of land between Michigan Ave. and Grand River Ave.

In about 1947, the fountain was in badly need of repairs and was removed.

Acreage 3.0.

* Memories of J. Gottlieb Reutter - J. W. Sexton