

West Park bandshell: A Brief History

Introduction to Our Project

Hello, we are Margaret Sansburn and Maggie Williams, and we are here to bring you this spotlight on West Park's amazing bandshell.

Before we get into our information about the bandshell, we would like to tell you about us and why we chose to do this project. We went to elementary and middle school at Ann Arbor Open. Maggie is going to Community High School and Margaret is going to Skyline for the 2022/2023 school year. We are Girl Scout Cadettes, and we are working on our Silver Award project. The Silver Award is the highest honor a Girl Scout Cadette can earn, and it consists of 50 leadership hours of service on a project that will have a lasting impact on the community, e.g., not just picking up trash for 50 hours. A better example would be setting up more trash/recycling bins and measures to prevent litter. We have until the end of September of our ninth-grade year to complete this project.

We chose to use our Silver Award project to help West Park because we like spending time there, and we use it frequently. We have gone on many field trips at West Park, participated on Girls on the Run there, and held Girl Scout meetings in the park. We wanted to help improve it, so first we conducted some research and then visited the park. Secondly, we reached out to the Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Department to see what we could do to help. While we talked to the Parks and Recreation department, they brought to our attention how small and sad the website was, and we decided we also wanted to try to make a sign because we saw that there were not a lot of informational signs at West Park. Margaret



decided to draft up a new website, and Maggie decided to write a sign about the bandshell to put at West Park.



These goals did not quite work out, but we decided to do something that will combine both of our visions by creating a virtual exhibit, what you are looking at now, focused on the bandshell. This will end up being more beneficial than a sign would be because, for one, the information on this can be updated and changed based on the newest information we have, for two, this can hold a lot

more content, for three, more people would be able to see it, and for four, the future of the bandshell is uncertain and this can honor it and showcase its history. In addition, the logistics of putting up a sign would have been much more difficult, while creating a virtual exhibit will accomplish the same goal with an easier process.

We want to bring attention to the bandshell because it houses a lot of rich history that probably goes right under most people's noses. We hope many people will notice some more of Ann Arbor's fascinating history, starting with the nearly 100-year-old bandshell that has been beloved for so long and houses a lot of fun and joyous memories for many.

A History of the Bandshell

Let's start at the beginning of the bandshell's history. In the 1930s an idea was proposed. Many wanted an outdoor stage to perform concerts and pageants in West Park. Many groups and organizations sponsored this idea, but no one was sure

if it was actually going to happen. The Works Progress Administration (a program created during the great depression by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help employ more people) helped fund this project, and the Ann Arbor city council was asked to provide the other \$7,000 dollars it needed. The council agreed. But later, the Ann Arbor city council said that they could only pay about \$5,000. So, some non-essentials were cut out, like a copper roof and a raised stage. The bandshell was finished in 1938, with a dedication on August 14th and concert by the University Summer Section Director's Band, attended by over 1800 people.

The West Park bandshell grew into a well-known place across Ann Arbor. Many performances and concerts have been held there, including performances

from the Grateful Dead, George Cooch, MC5, and many others. The bandshell has entertained people for many years. However, the bandshell has brought trouble as well. In the late 1960s, many people were upset about the noise level of the concerts, and how crazy some of them were getting. Many were filing complaints, including people working in



office buildings nearby. People were upset about noise levels and illegal activities in their neighborhood, among other things. This led to discussions around Ann Arbor and the Ann Arbor city council about how to balance the wants of the concertgoers and organizers with those of the neighbors and complainers. The Ann Arbor city council eventually requested there be other places in Ann Arbor where some events could be hosted, including Gallup and Fuller Parks. The West Park bandshell brought joy to many people for a long time, and it is a striking addition to the park with a lot of interesting history.

Current Day Bandshell

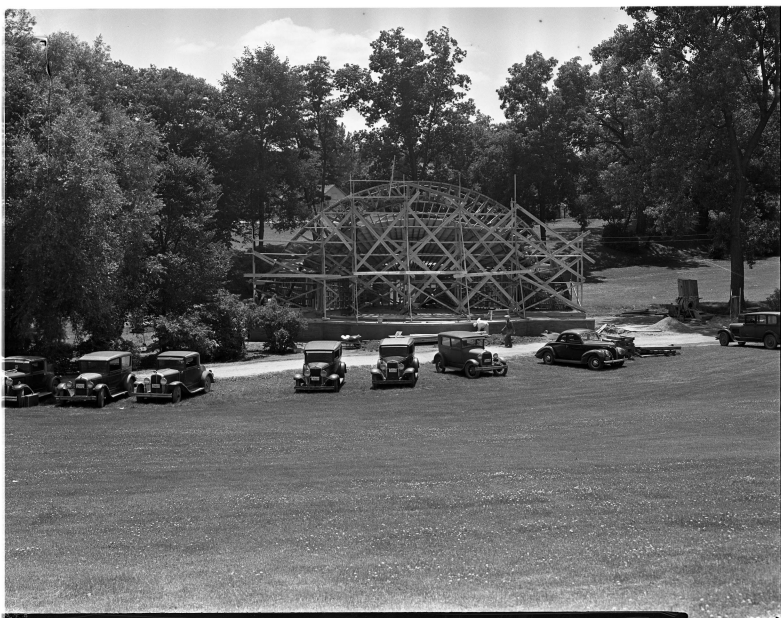
Today, the bandshell is behind fences, due to its deteriorating foundation. The concrete and masonry of the foundation has been crumbling for years. Large amounts of moisture in the soil, as well as the freeze-thaw cycle of water expanding and contracting, has been especially tough on the bandshell. Experts think the bandshell won't last long in its current state, so other options are being considered. Among those is the possibility of moving the bandshell to the field across from or behind it. The moisture level in either of those places would pose less of a risk to the bandshell's integrity. The structure likely would not change, it would just be in a location that would allow it to provide public enjoyment longer.



Deeper Diving Questions

Question: How was it constructed? What materials were used? What were the stages of construction?

Answer: Some of the materials are wood, concrete, steel, sand, pebbles, and paint. The bandshell also has some stage lights on the rim of the shell, meant



to shine on the performers. They started by building the foundation out of concrete blocks, then they framed the arc and back out of wood and covered them in concrete. They used wooden supports and scaffolding for the work. They gave the structure a composite roof in a nice copper color. You

can find some pictures of the bandshell construction below.



Question: How has the West Park bandshell been used? What different types of events and activities have been staged there?

Answer: The bandshell has been used mainly for concerts throughout its many decades. Occasionally, other events have been held at the bandshell including a few pageants, some poetry readings in the summer of 1976, and other various events held in the summer.



Question: Why was it built when it was? What were the socio-economic/political conditions at the time?

Answer: The bandshell was built during the Great Depression with funding by a federal program called the Works Progress Administration, which was created to help employ individuals. The WPA helped fund a LOT of things, including building schools, bridges, hospitals, and sewer systems, planting trees, and paving and repaving roads. They helped build bandshells, amphitheatres, and bandstands around this time, since listening to music



outside was something that appealed to many people.

Question: Were bandshells built in other parts of the U.S. around the same time? Are they still in use?

Answer: Yes, other bandshells were built at the time, some of which are no longer in use and some that are. Bandstands and bandshells grew in popularity in America around the great depression, a place where people could enjoy music outdoors without paying a whole lot, if at all. Some examples of bandshells that were built in the 30s and are still used today are the Mesang bandshell in Ashland, Wisconsin, the Ames bandshell in Ames, Iowa, and the Washington Park bandshell in Milwaukee, Illinois. Some of the bandshells across the U.S. were also built by the Works Progress Administration. There is a very large timespan in which the bandshells across the U.S. were built, spanning all the way from the late 1800s to the late 1900s. Some of the older bandshells have been restored and are still in use today.



Question: Why was it built where it was? What aspects of the surrounding area make for a good site for a bandshell? What aspects of the surrounding area have proved a poor fit for it?

Answer: One reason it might have been built where it is is because of

the beautiful scenery that West Park provides. The trees and hills and pond are really pretty, and putting a musical venue among them adds to the beauty. Another reason it might have been built where it is is because of the hills around it, which most likely help to amplify the music. A reason that this location might not be beneficial for the bandshell is the water content of the soil, which we mentioned in the Current Day Bandshell section.

Question: Why a bandshell form? What are the advantages of that form of construction? What are the disadvantages for use with electronically amplified music & sound/mics?

Answer: A big advantage to the bandshell, as opposed to other forms of construction, is the natural acoustic resonance that comes from the shell form, amplifying the sound of the music in the direction of the listeners (especially if the audience sits in a semi-circle). Electronic amplification might mess with the sound, or make it too loud.



If you have any questions about West Park or its bandshell, you can contact

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