

April 1973

ISLAND PARK

AREA	35.0 Acres
BOUNDARIES	Cedar Bend Drive and Broadway on the north, Huron River on south, Cedar Bend Drive on east and Island Drive Apartments and Wall Street on the west.
FACILITIES	Three shelters, Picnicking, Fishing, Playground, Nature Study, Hiking, Scenic Overlook.

The park we now call Island Park was formerly known as Cedar Bend Park. The big bend in the Huron River had been known to the people of Ann Arbor as the Cedar Bend and apparently, from custom and common usage, when the Park was established there, it became Cedar Bend Park. Later it was called Cedar Bend Park and the Island, and ultimately Island Park.

The Fifty foot wide piece of land for the construction of Cedar Bend Avenue was obtained by the City in 1888 from Messrs. Weeks, Lennon and Gardner (Deed W-12 dated October 4, 1888). A further parcel, directly opposite Cedar Bend Avenue, was obtained in 1894 from Isaac Dunn and his Wife, for an extension of this fifty foot roadway running north from Broadway to the east side of Mill Street, now Jones Drive, (Deed D-5 dated August 28, 1894).

By resolution of Council on May 17, 1897 it was decided to appoint a committee "to examine the subject and to secure options on certain property along the Huron River near the Boulevard for the purpose of a public park." Two years later this special committee reported that they had secured options on all the necessary property on the north side of the river, and recommended to Council that the City purchase the following properties:-

Island Park (continued)

1. From Spencer D. Lennon, a strip of land lying between the Boulevard and the river containing about 15 acres price \$1,000.00
2. From George W. Weeks, a strip of land 4 rods wide and next the river across his property, price \$100.00
3. From George H. Rhodes, a strip of land 4 rods wide across his property, and next the river, also the island containing about 5 acres, price \$500.00.

By Resoltuion of Council on June 20, 1904, the City Attorney was instructed to purchase the Lennon property of $15\frac{1}{2}$ acres for \$1,000.00 (Deed W-15 dated August 16, 1904), and to appropriate \$550.00 for the purchase of the island in the river belonging to the Rhodes Estate and a driveway thereto, and also a piece of property belonging to George Weeks.

In October 1904, deeds were obtained from Norman D. Gates, administrator of the estate of Helen C. Rhodes, deceased, and from Mary A. Whitlark, of the land between Maiden Lane and the land purchased from George Weeks, also the island in the Huron River for the sum of \$500.00, i.e. \$250.00 for the Rhodes property (Deed R-5 dated September 27, 1904) and \$250.00 for the Whitlark property (Deed W-16 dated October 13, 1904).

The City Council appropriated \$500.00 from the contingency fund for making the grounds on the Lennon property passable, i.e. to clean out all driftwood, pile up all loose stones, cut weeds, repair bridge and build a roadway from Maiden Lane entrance along the river as far as necessary.

A Professor Simonds was hired by the Park Commissioners to make a plan for the development and laying out of the Park his fee not to exceed \$100.00, and on July 17, 1905 the Park Committee of Council made the following report:-

"Your committee on parks have inspected the work being done by the park commission in the park lying between the river and Cedar Bend Avenue, and beg leave to report that your committee highly approve the work being done by the park commissioners, with the exception of building the road as laid out by Professor Simonds from Cedar Bend Avenue near the bridge running along the bank, which would necessitate

Island Park (continued)

making a large cut in the side of the bank which would be liable to wash and would be a bad road to maintain; it would also cause the cutting of about forty trees out of the grove. This your committee did not deem advisable, therefore, your committee would recommend that the council request the board of park commissioners to defer this work until plans and an estimate of cost of said road has been made by the said park commission and presented to and acted upon favorably by this council.

Your committee would further recommend, that the board of park commissioners be and is hereby instructed to build a road along the river from Maiden Lane to Cedar Bend Avenue, as it was laid out last year by the park committee and street commissioner for which there has already been an appropriation of \$500.00."

An additional piece of property containing 2 acres adjacent to that already purchased for this Park was obtained from Judge Kinne for \$600.00 (Deed K-5 dated June 22, 1905). Also purchased was a parcel of land from George and Lucy Weeks for \$100.00 (Deed W-17 dated July 27, 1905).

A report on Cedar Bend Park appears in the Park Board Minutes of December 15, 1905, and it is here given in full:-

"The Park is located on the bank of the Huron and is by far the largest Park in the City. The greatest amount of effort was devoted to its development. The position of the land is such that it lends itself and development for pleasure riding, driving and for picnics, swimming and it has been used very extensively for those purposes during the past summer. There is, however, small opportunity for play grounds. The most important thing was to make it possible for people to enter the Park to see its natural beauty. This required a driveway and Mr. O.C. Simmonds a landscape architect was employed to lay out such a driveway. One entering the Park by this driveway will notice that first the Huron River with its rapid current, its islands, and

Island Park (continued)

attractive trees and shrubs bordering to the margins. Here the adjoining low fields and swamps on the west and north west should be shut out by trees and shrubs. This will make a beautiful restful entrance. Passing the bridge the Park begins to widen and the driveway leaves the edge of the river and while people driving shall have command of the river, the pedestrian may walk leasurably along its bank out of danger and dust. This also allows development of a lawn. The driveway now passes the foot hill of the grape vineyards through the only level ground in the park. This ground is entirely undeveloped. From now on the drive ascends the hill to the boulevard, passing by attractive trees, through deep woods and long openings which give excellent view of the Huron valley and the City of Ann Arbor.

The most used spot in the Park is the beautiful island in which was held many picnics. This was cut many times during spring and summer. The hill side was cut with scythes as was also the land between the river and the west and north west line. The land between the Huron River and Week's line is low and the soil is formed of peat. This land is very wet and it was necessary to clean out several ditches and to lay considerable amount of tile. Four bridges are now located on the park. One from the mainland to the island, another across the creek from the boulevard, and a third a cement bridge on the boulevard. The fourth is on Traver creek. The last bridge named was repaired while temporary bridges were put up in two other places.

The agreement made with Mr. Weeks by the City two years ago required the city to build a line fence. This has been put up a distance of 60 rods but Mr. Weeks stood half of expense for 38 rods. Several swings of various materials have been tried on the island. None of these have been successful as they could not stand the wear. Expense \$6.05.

Island Park (continued)

Two closets were erected on the mainland.

The city had an accurate survey of the property made and a part of the expense was borne by the Park fund. This was \$15.00. There were about 8 block cords of wood removed in making the drive in addition to that wanted for rustic work in the Park. This will be traded to Mr. William Freeman for team labor.

The high water of last spring nearly destroyed the bridge over Traver Creek. This was due largely to the relative position of the two. The committee has had the creek straightened and believe that the bridge will not be damaged by high water next spring."

The Park Commissioners recommended that the following work be undertaken at Cedar Bend Park:-

1. That the entrance to the Park be put in its final condition. This includes the planting of 4240 shrubs, 16 trees, building a foot path 3 feet wide next to the river from Maiden Lane to the cottage.
2. That an open shelter be built on the extreme southern end of the Island. Said shelter to be 24 by 36 feet according to diagram.
3. That two cement foot bridges be built. One from the mainland to the island, and the second from the third island to the mainland.
4. A baseball diamond be built on the flat purchased from Mr. Weeks.
5. That road be finished. This includes some grading, gravelling and ditching.
6. That shrubs be planted to hold the banks from washing, and increase their beauty, which were cut in forming the new roadway.

In 1907 the City Council gave the Park Commissioners authority over the road known as Cedar Bend Avenue; and in 1907 the Park Board moved that a small shelter and swimming hole for small children be built, (not to exceed \$50.00).

Island Park (continued)

In 1913 the octagon building at Burns Park was taken down and moved to the Island. A year later, Mr. George Spathelf erected a cement bench at the Park, and Mr. John Koch was given the contract for the construction of the shelter in Cedar Bend Park at a cost of \$780.00. The total cost of the new shelter was listed in the financial statement for 1914 as \$859.64.

A City Ordinance of August 7, 1916 states that on the drive known as Cedar Bend Drive vehicles must enter from Broadway and go down hill past Island, and exit at Wall Street bridge. Except that vehicles may enter at Wall Street Bridge and go as far as the Island Shelter, in the opposite direction.

The construction of a concrete bridge at Island Park as it was then called was proposed in 1916, but because the estimates proved to be twice the amount of the \$500.00 appropriated for this purpose, the Park Board decided not to build the permanent concrete bridge at that time, but asked Council for permission to repair the existing wooden bridge and to construct an additional wooden foot bridge at the lower end of the Island, for a sum not in excess of \$200.00 of the appropriated total of \$500.00. Council, however, decided to proceed with the permanent bridge, and appropriated the sum of \$1,300.00 in the Bridge, Culvert and Crosswalk Fund for this purpose. The Park Board informed Council that they considered the building of the bridge undesirable and uneconomical at that time, but if Council wished to go ahead, then the Board of Park Commissioners would close the contract with J. P. Rusche of Grand Rapids for the construction of the concrete bridge for \$1,169.88. When the Superintendent of Parks approached the contractor, he stated that he was no longer interested in taking the contract.

The City Engineer thought the bridge could be built for much less than Mr. Rusche's bid and Council authorized him to construct the bridge according to his plans and specifications and under the direction of the Parks Department. Construction began in the Spring of 1918.

Island Park (continued)

In 1920 the Parks Department purchased a 40 foot lot on the corner of Wall Street, Maiden Lane and Island Drive (then Cedar Bend Drive) from John T. Berry for \$255.00 (Deed B-18 dated June 8, 1929).

In 1923 Dr. Irving was given access to Cedar Bend Drive near the Island in exchange for a parcel of land at the Broadway entrance to Cedar Bend Drive. Another parcel of land was purchased from Albert John Irving and Frances Whitney Irving in 1928 for \$7,500.00 (Deed I-2 dated March 19, 1928).

At a Park Board meeting of March 23, 1928 a plan showing a new location for the Old Boulevard leading from Cedar Bend to Fuller Street was submitted by Professor W. L. Badger, joint owner of the adjoining property. The Board approved, providing Professor Badger made concession satisfactory to the park Board.

The late Adolph Diehl left the City of Ann Arbor five \$1,000.00 New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad bonds for the purpose of erecting a shelter in Island Park. These bonds were held for some time and interest received was invested in U.S. Savings bonds. When a favorable market developed, the Council authorized their sale, and the proceed of \$3,086.47 was invested in U.S. Savings Bonds also.

In 1953 the Superintendent of Parks reported on a meeting with Miss Katherine Diehl and Mr. Earl Cress regarding the Adolph Diehl Trust Fund. Miss Diehl being anxious to have something decided and done in the near future. It was reported that the architect, Mr. Houston Colvin, did not recommend the placing of another structure on the Island, and suggested the rerouting of the drive past the Island to a new location at some distance from the river. This move would necessitate the purchase of additional land. The Superintendent of Parks was directed to find out if the necessary land could be acquired and at what price.

Island Park (continued)

In 1955, Mr. Bent Nielsen requested permission to construct two outlets from streets across park property to connect with Island Drive. Bedford-McManus also proposed a development for the river bottom land along Island Drive and adjacent to Island Park. The Park Board approved the project in principle with special attention being given to the interest and needs of the Park Department and the area and to the City at large.

Some of the items of need were, widening of the roadway, raising grade of roadway, relocation of approach to Wall Street with improvement of visibility, alternate access, buffer strips and screening, provision of adequate parking at Island Park and possible relocation of Island Drive opposite the island to give greater safety to park patrons.

In 1960 appraisers were employed to appraise the McManus property adjacent to Island Park, as well as an architect to make studies of the locations and type of park shelter to be constructed. These studies would involve a determination regarding the existing toilet, shelter and pavilion buildings. It was also suggested that the Diehl funds be reserved towards the new shelter building. The sum of \$750.00 was appropriated from the Capital Improvement Fund for these purposes; and in September 1961 architect Robert Metcalf was appointed to design the shelter for Island Park, although the title to the land near Island Park for straightening Island Drive had not yet been received.

Mr. Metcalf submitted his plans and estimates for the shelter in December 1961. The cost of the shelter, including fees, construction and the necessary utilities was estimated at \$30,000.00. The Diehl Fund was to supply \$7,124.37 towards this project, and the remaining \$22,875.63 was to be included in the budget for that year.

In May 1962, bids were received for this shelter. The low bid, in the amount of \$21,600.00 was submitted by Niethammer-McDowell Construction Company and they were

Island Park (continued)

awarded the contract. An appropriation of \$32,896.00 was authorized by Council to cover the cost of construction, the architect's fees of \$1,296.00 plus \$10,000.00 to cover the cost of extending a sewer force main and water mains to the site. The sum of \$7,377.00 was taken from the Diehl Trust Fund and \$25,519.00 from the Capital Improvements. The Shelter was dedicated on September 15, 1962. It contained a memorial plaque with the inscription "Built with help of Adolph J. Diehl Gift."

In 1964 the structure at the south end of the Island known as the Greek Shelter was repaired and painted at a cost of \$1,366.20. Furthermore, in the summer of that year, twenty mallard ducks were obtained from the City of Three Rivers, Michigan, and released at Island Park. These ducks are fed by Park Department personnel and the general public. The flock thrived under their careful protection and generous feedings of corn and breadcrumbs. By 1966, the number of ducks had risen to about 150, due to the tame ducks who raised their broods on the river banks, the outgrown Easter pets, some French mallards that someone dropped off there, and last, but not least, by the wild ducks, wooed by such a plush existence, who gave up their migrating and settled down there. On occasion the public have contributed funds towards the feeding of the ducks.

A footbridge from the bank just east of the shelter to the small Island was erected in 1967. The span was supplied by Price Brothers Company for \$900.00, and the Murphey-Day Construction Company installed the Bridge abutment for an additional \$900.00 making a total of \$1800.00 for this bridge.