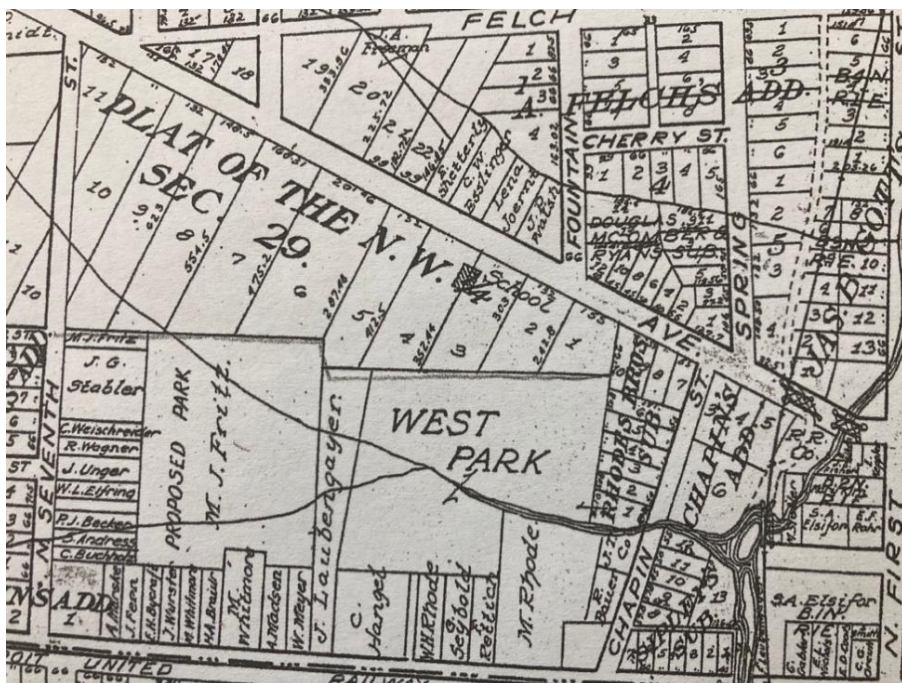


Highlights Among the 28 Parcels

A Tale of Two West Parks Did you know there was for a time a West Park-east and a West Park-west? From 1915 to 1921 two parts of West Park were separated by a piece of private property, making traveling between them a fair amount of a challenge.

It all began in 1907 with the parks board wanting to buy --as its first purchase of land for West Park--- a large tract of land fronting on Huron Street owned by heirs of D. McIntyre. Well that didn't happen. A second opportunity to purchase the land came up a few years later, but the city was not in a position financially to buy it. A rather amazing thing happened at that point. One of the park board commissioners, Michael J. Fritz, stepped right up and bought the land himself to hold it until the city was in a financial position to purchase it from him. In November 1915 the city did just that. And with that action the size of West Park doubled! (And, totally unforeseen at that time, that purchase would in about 25 years also provide the site for the Band Shell.)

The Fritz purchase also gave West Park access on Huron Street (prior to that the only way into West Park from Huron Street was along a right of way strip). Now, double-amazing, Michael Fritz did not stop there. He had also purchased, with the city in mind, a small property on Seventh Street that was positioned to give West Park access from Seventh Street, and he folded that parcel into the deal.



The only problem here was one particular property owner, Jacob Laubengayer, refused to sell to the city or Fritz. His land lay smack dab in the middle between old West Park and the Fritz purchase. Effectively, there was a West Park-east (what had been West Park) and a West Park-west (the Fritz purchase), and no path, no bridge allowed the public to walk between them (see [map at left](#)). What to do?

What the park commissioners did do was look for other ways to bridge the two parts of West Park. As it turned out, an unused right of way for a defunct electric interurban line (the Jackson & Ann Arbor Railway Co.) crossed the Laubengayer tract. (In 1901 Jacob Laubengayer had granted the

company a 3-rod wide right of way through his property; many of his neighbors did the same.) By 1915 the Detroit-Jackson and Chicago Railway owned this unused right of way. So the park board asked for and was granted permission from the railway to use the right of way over the Laubengayer land as a connecting corridor between West Park-east and West Park-west. Ironically enough and to the benefit of West Park, Jacob Laubengayer's widow, Amelia Laubengayer, later made the land available for sale, and in 1921 the city purchased it for West Park. Now more than just a corridor connected the two parts. They flowed together seamlessly the full east-west width of the park.

Needless to say, the park board was very appreciative of Michael Fritz' role in enlarging West Park and gaining more access points. A few years after all these events, a movement was mounted for a name change from 'West Park' to 'Fritz Park'. Michael Fritz, however, refused to permit the change, reportedly feeling that the title 'West Park' was too intimately associated with the park to be altered. Through his actions with the land and in securing marble pillars for the Pergola, clearly Michael Fritz held the welfare of West Park in high esteem.

Tragically, Michael Fritz met a sudden death in October 1930 when struck by a car while walking across West Washington. Following his wishes, his heirs donated a plot of land on Pauline Blvd. to the city for use as a public park, stipulating that a park shelter be built there using materials from razing Michael Fritz's homestead. Ornamental trees and shrubbery were to be taken from the homestead and used in landscaping public parks. Development of parks for Ann Arbor was a keen interest of Michael Fritz.

Swapping Land with Public Schools The story of West Park's connection with public schools seems to have begun with the park board in 1915 giving permission to the Ann Arbor school board to use some ground at West Park for a children's playground. The School Board was to be responsible for the cost of the apparatus, but its erection and the supervision of the playground was the responsibility of the Superintendent of Parks.

Then in 1924 the city received a petition from Herman A. Ottmar and 146 others requesting the grounds formerly occupied by the old Mack/3rd Ward School on the south side of Miller Avenue be added to West Park. This led in January 1925 to a swap of land with Ann Arbor Public Schools. West Park gained land on top of the north bluff that had served as grounds for the old Mack/3rd Ward School. The land fronted on Miller Avenue, so West Park also gained access from the north. The Pergola was later erected there.

The old Mack/3rd Ward School opened in 1866 as the 3rd Ward School. In 1901 it was renamed Mack, or Christian Mack, after a longtime school board member, Christian Mack. By the end of World War I, the old Mack/3rd Ward School was overcrowded to the point of overflowing –according to Grace Shackman (local historian) classes sprawled over into the cloakrooms and even a nearby chapel. During the 1920s the superintendent of Ann Arbor public schools implemented a systematic update of Ann Arbor's school buildings. A new Mack School at Miller and Seventh was one of four new schools (the others being Angell, Burns Park, and Jones [Community High School]). After the new Mack School opened in September 1922, the old Mack School was torn down. It was the grounds of the torn down school that Ann Arbor Public Schools offered to the city for West Park, as a swap to obtain a girl's playground for another school in Ann Arbor's school system – Perry School.

First built in 1903, Perry School was named after W. S. Perry, a former Ann Arbor schools superintendent. Adjoining Hanover Square on the south side of Packard, Perry School served boys and girls in what was a growing neighborhood just south of downtown. Co-rec playgrounds apparently were not a part of the school scene in those days, and while boys seem to have had a playground, girls did not.

In 1907 the park board granted Perry School use of that part of Hanover Square adjacent to the school for a playground for the girls of the school. Across Packard, was the rest of Hanover Square. Apparently the interurban railroad ran along Packard, also cutting diagonally through Hanover Square. In January 1925 the city deeded the part of Hanover Square used by Perry School to the public schools board, in exchange for the old Mack/3rd Ward School grounds to be added to West Park. The remaining part of Hanover Square, now more a triangle than a rectangle, was around that time equipped with play equipment, and it too was mostly a children's playground until 1968.

But swaps of land between West Park and the public schools board did not end with the 1925 exchange. Swaps occurred in both 1927 and 1936 --and the same land was swapped back and forth. In the 1927 swap West Park lost a southeast portion of the park but gained several parcels of land to the north. For the school system the swap gave Bach School a children's playground in what had been the southeast portion of West Park. Apparently two tennis courts were displaced by the swap and the school board agreed to replace them at a new site in West Park. By 1936 the public schools board apparently was less interested in that playground for Bach School and more interested in acquiring land elsewhere in the park system that could assist in the building of Slauson School. In the 1936 swap that deeded park land elsewhere to the public schools board West Park recouped its lost land. In addition, West Park gained a narrow strip of land adjacent to an alley running from West Huron Street to West Park, thus widening an access. West Park seems to have fared quite well overall in these swaps.