

## **A Deep Dive into the Past: Belize Park & Surroundings**

**By Martha Hill**

For a small neighborhood park, Belize Park carries quite a lot of history, including tragedies and celebrations.

### **Land acquisition**

Belize Park came into existence in pieces through purchases from private individuals. In 1974 the main piece -- 742 Fountain Street -- was purchased from James L. and Eileen Newburn. [1] Sadly, on that site nine years earlier Mrs. Essie Logan (age 56) and young Michael Brown (age 4) died in a housefire. For purchasing the property a portion of the city's 1966 voter-approved 2.5 million dollar park bond issue [2] was matched by funds from a \$200,00 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant. [3]

In 1992 the city purchased adjoining property -- 517 Summit, bought from Gregory Long. [4] Roughly three-quarters of that property was sold to become affordable housing, with the city retaining the other piece to serve as a small extension to Belize Park. That extension, jutting out at the back (southeast) corner of the park, is where a rain garden is located.

### **Tribute to a sister city**

Belize Park is so named to honor and celebrate Belize City, Belize, a sister city of Ann Arbor and one of three sister cities at the time the park was dedicated in 1975. Describing Ann Arbor's sister city program, local historian Grace Shackman indicates the number of sister cities has since grown to seven -- Tübingen, Germany since 1965; Belize City, British Honduras (later Belize) since 1967; Hikone, Japan since 1969; Peterborough, Ontario since 1983; Juigalpa, Nicaragua since 1986; Dakar, Senegal since 1997; and Remedios, Cuba since 2003. She also writes:

“The sister city program was started by the Ann Arbor chapter of People to People. The national People to People organization was the outgrowth of a 1956 White House conference in which President Eisenhower suggested, as quoted in the Ann Arbor News, ‘Not among nations – but among people – are the true seeds of lasting peace sown.’ The local People to People group was formally organized in May of 1965....

In 1967 Belize City, then capital of what was then British Honduras, agreed to be Ann Arbor's second sister city, shortly after the state of Michigan asked British Honduras to be their first sister state. Carl Zwinck, president of the local People to People chapter, explained that whereas Tübingen had many similarities with Ann Arbor, that Belize was the opposite where ‘primitive conditions remain in the wake of modern advancement.’ However, he said the goal was the same, ‘to develop understanding and fellowship through personal contact and cultural exchanges.’”[5]

With Belize City agreeing to the sister-city affiliation, a July 1967 Ann Arbor News article described Belize City [then in British Honduras] as follows:

“Despite the fact that the ‘national library contains about as many volumes as an elementary school library in Ann Arbor,’ that relatively few persons ever attend high school and that there is no television and only one radio station, about 90 per cent of the people are able to read and write English, Zwinck said....

‘It isn’t a case where we want to support these people. Rather, we desire to assist them.’... ‘Because there is such a shortage of books, we would like to start a book drive right away.’...

Zwinck explained that Belize and British Honduras are within the territory of the ancient Mayan civilization and the people there have expressed a desire to revive the artistic culture of this group....

Zwinck said arrangements are already being made to have Belize art work on display at the 1968 art fair in Ann Arbor.

People-to-People will be directing its efforts mainly in cultural areas, Zwinck explained. In addition, ‘We’ll try to be a catalyst for other programs....’ [6]

A visit by Belize boy scouts to Ann Arbor was followed a year later by a visit by Ann Arbor boy scouts to Belize. Subsequently:

“... in February 1968, five Ann Arborites attended a conference in Belize. One of the members, Shata Ling, took the opportunity to look for specific ways Ann Arbor could help. For instance, a play was performed for the delegation using a curtain made of rags. She noticed that the school for the blind didn’t have enough Braille books and that the libraries could all use more books written in Spanish. In November [1968] Michigan sent a convey of six trucks to British Honduras [Belize] with contributions from all over the state including curtain material, school supplies, and hospital equipment from Ann Arbor.” [5]

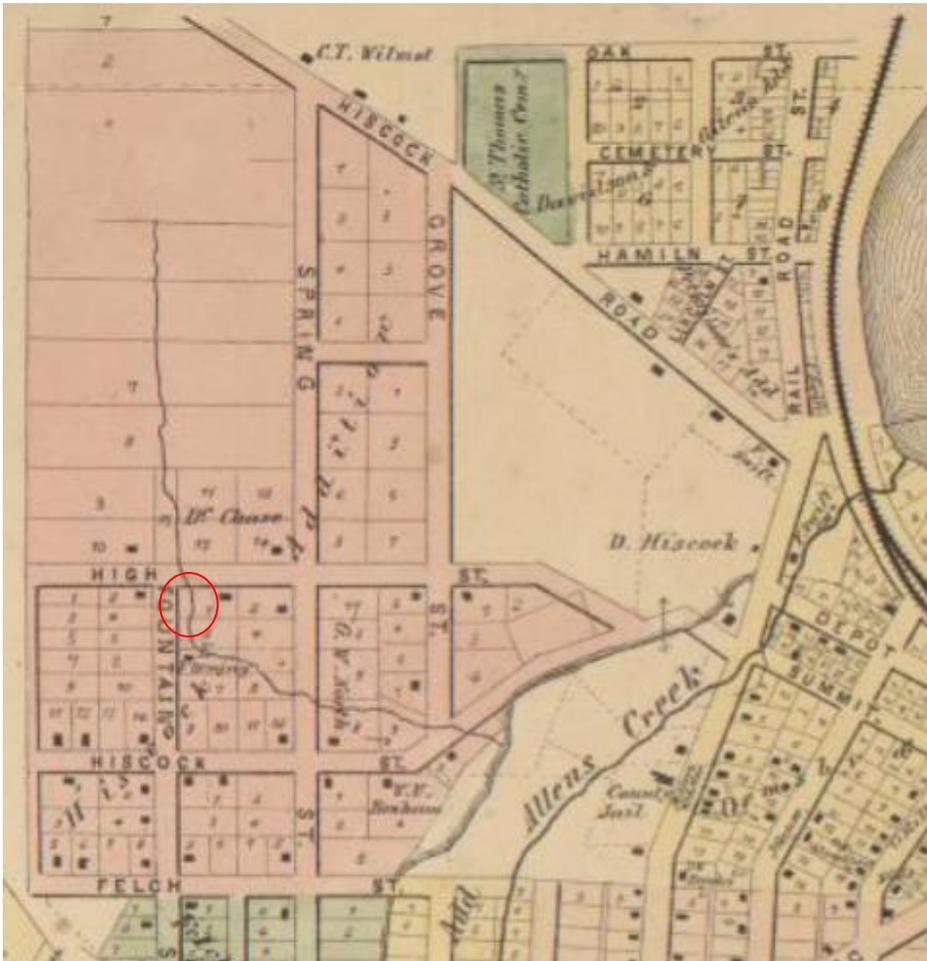
Some years later – on June 16, 1975 -- Belize Park was dedicated to this sister city. The mayor at the time was Albert Wheeler, the winner of the 1975 mayoral election, in which the voting was ranked-choice voting. He was Ann Arbor’s first Black mayor. As a tribute to Belize City, Mayor Wheeler both dedicated Belize Park and declared June 15 to 21 “Belize City Week”. [7] In attendance at the park dedication were several people from Belize.

Sister-cities relationships, including the one with Belize City, seem to have become mostly inactive. Only Tubingen and Hikone have, through time, appeared consistently in newspaper reports. Still, Grace Shackman tells us:

“Even if most of the city sisters are inactive, they are still good memories for those who participated.” [5]

## **The neighborhood**

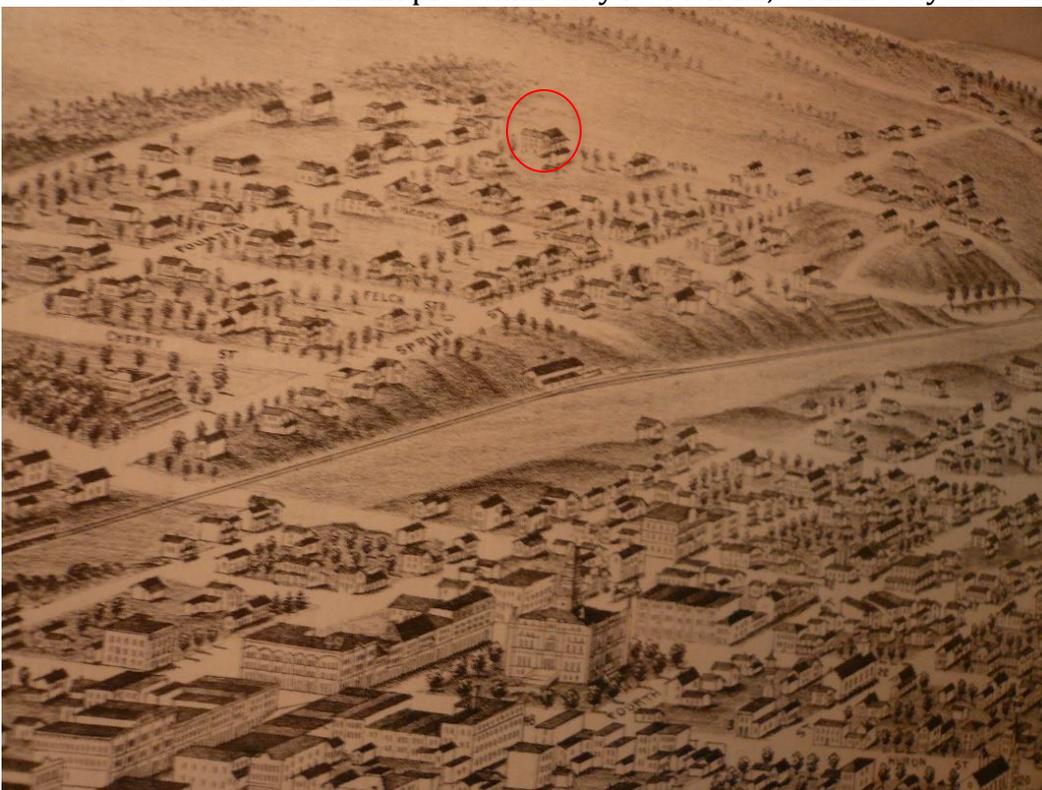
The neighborhood surrounding Belize Park is one with strong roots in the past. In 1864, as Figure 1 suggests, there was a light peppering of buildings (most likely houses) scattered throughout the neighborhood. Some were as far north as High Street [now Summit Street]. Four were on the same block as Belize Park’s future location and one was quite near what would become Belize Park.



**Figure 1:** The land that is now Belize Park appears (left of center) at the corner of Fountain and High St. in this north-facing segment of an [1864 map](#) [plan] of the City of Ann Arbor. [8] Note that in this map the diagonal road at the north border of Hiscocks Addition is called Hiscock Road. It is also known as Chubb Road [later Sunset Road].

By 1880, as seen in a [panoramic birds-eye view map of Ann Arbor](#) (Figure 2), the neighborhood contained considerably more houses. It is difficult to say how accurate the drawing is but viewing the area as a whole gives a feel for the character of the neighborhood. There were now about a dozen houses on the block of Belize Park's future site, including a sizable house right where Belize Park

will be. There were even some clusters of houses, and houses made an appearance up Spring Street as far as Chubb Road [now Sunset Road]. At that time, though, there was still considerable open space. Over time, houses would crop up on much of that open space but the area would remain predominantly residential, with mostly one- and two-family houses.



**Figure 2:** The land that is now Belize Park is toward the upper center, at Fountain and High St. in this north-facing segment of an [1880 map of the City of Ann Arbor](#). [9]

In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s part of the life of the neighborhood -- and a common feature of it -- was the corner grocery store. The neighborhood is said to have been well-supplied with grocery stores sprinkled throughout within easy walking distance for residents. Most have since disappeared, leaving only subtle hints of their past existence – in features of a house or building -- or they left no trace at all (for some specifics see the Memories section toward the close of this article). Some sense of what life with neighborhood corner grocery stores was like can still be experienced today (early in 2022) at the corner of Spring Street and Miller Avenue, where both Knight’s Market and Big City Bakery continue to do a lively business. And the neighborhood continues to be oriented to walking -- with people frequently walking around the neighborhood and to downtown Ann Arbor.

Through time, the neighborhood has been called various names. At the time of Belize Park’s dedication and for many years afterwards many knew the neighborhood surrounding the park as the West Side. This name came about because the neighborhood, then a predominantly Black neighborhood, lay to the west of and was closely tied to the older Black neighborhood across Main Street, known today as Kerrytown. Residents who grew up in those neighborhoods in the 1970s have vivid memories of the life and the connections of the neighborhoods then. [10] Though the neighborhood continues to have a diverse population, it no longer reflects as strongly its historical roots as a Black neighborhood.

In the early 1990s the area around Belize Park was the focal point for efforts to preserve the character of the neighborhood, and the local newspaper carried numerous articles about discussions and activities concerning that. In the reported news of the time, it was the neighborhood’s location more than any name that identified it. Though still the West Side to many, it was often reported as a ‘near northwest side’, ‘near north side’, or ‘north-central’ neighborhood.

In recent years – at least in the world of realtors -- the Belize Park neighborhood acquired a new name -- Water Hill – and the name West Side moved closer to Eberwhite Nature Area. As of the later part of 2020, realtors were saying a house in the Belize Park neighborhood is “in coveted Water Hill”, and a house near Eberwhite Elementary School is “in one of the most popular neighborhoods on Ann Arbor’s West Side”. Thus ‘West Side’ has moved to the south, and what was West Side has become Water Hill.

The name Water Hill was appropriated from a music festival held in the neighborhood. When Paul and Claire Tinkerhess, neighborhood residents, created and began organizing a music festival to center around the neighborhood’s many musicians, they went imaginatively searching for a name. They found inspiration in the hill the neighborhood sits on and the presence of so many water-related names of streets (i.e., Fountain, Spring, Brooks). With that, Water Hill Music Fest was born.

This grassroots open-air music festival in the Belize Park (and Hunt Park) neighborhood was the afternoon of the first Sunday in May for the years 2011-2018. Amazingly enough, the weather always cooperated by providing sunshine for the afternoon of music even when the day began overcast and sprinkling. The festival was free and open to the public, with no commercial endeavors allowed. Volunteers ran the show. Musicians played on

front porches, lawns, driveways, patios, decks, and garage roofs throughout the neighborhood. Solo performers and bands of any size were included as long as at least one person resided in the neighborhood. Belize Park was an island of tranquility in the exuberance of sidewalks and streets flowing with the peopled audience. For a better sense of the flavor and feel of the Water Hill Music Fest google 'Water Hill Music Festival' and visit:

<https://waterhill.org>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90H8iCFBV4c>

[https://localwiki.org/ann-arbor/Water Hill Music Fest](https://localwiki.org/ann-arbor/Water_Hill_Music_Fest)

It must have been far from the Tinkerhess' wildest imaginings that the name 'Water Hill' would subsequently be taken up by the real estate world as the neighborhood's name. But that is exactly what happened, and Water Hill is what realtors and many others call the neighborhood today.

Paul and Claire Tinkerhess were also instrumental in bringing into existence another community-oriented feature of the neighborhood – clearing of snow and ice from neighborhood sidewalks by an all-volunteer non-profit funded by voluntary contributions from neighborhood residents. To learn more, see [www.snowbuddy.org](http://www.snowbuddy.org).

### **The land sees its way into the city**

Lost in the fogs of time is a name that predates West Side. The land of the Belize Park (and Hunt Park) neighborhood once went by yet another name -- Buttercup Hill, a name conjuring up open sunny fields that buttercup flowers love. By one account:

“Beginning in the 1820s, Harvey Chubb traveled from his farm into town along the ridge of Buttercup Hill. His route soon began to be called Chubb Road .... but in 1927 it was changed to Sunset Road....” [11]

The name Buttercup Hill seems to have faded away as more and more houses grew in what were once farmers' fields and groves. Possibly in the neighborhood today there are a few trees still remembering the name but among people it has slipped from common knowledge.

Buttercup Hill, most likely, was a name still in use at the time the land surrounding and holding Belize (and Hunt) Park became a part of the city. That occurred in 1859 when a local farmer and politician named Daniel Hiscock filed a plat (a map of an area of land, especially a proposed site for construction) that he called [Hiscocks Addition](#). [12] Daniel Hiscock's farm was adjacent. According to his later obituary, his livestock included cattle and sheep, and his peach orchard was said to be one of the finest in the county. He was a dealer in wool, and his wool operation extended throughout Washtenaw County. He also dealt in coal and wood. In addition, he was one of the directors of the Ann Arbor Savings Bank, and he was active in politics.

The plat for [Hiscocks Addition](#) depicted lots drawn across a sizable tract of land he owned. He would soon put the lots up for sale. The name of the track of land carried his last name along with an indication that the land was being added to Ann Arbor proper, city

boundaries expanding out to include it. The [1864 map](#) gives a good idea of how this addition fit into the city at that time. [8] Hiscocks Addition is in the northwest part of the city (upper left part of the map). The land Belize Park now sits on is comprised of parts of Lots 1 & 3 in Block 7 of Hiscocks Addition, shown on the map at the corner of Fountain Street and High Street [now Summit Street].

### **Life & death and rights & social connections in the 1800s and early 1900s**

**Social connections.** Stepping back to the time the land became part of Ann Arbor, we find a social link connecting Belize Park, Hunt Park, and Eberwhite Nature Area because, interestingly, there are two names on the plat document – those of Daniel Hiscock and Maria Hiscock, his wife. At the time married women could not own land but they did have some rights to their husband’s land. Maria Hiscock was a daughter of Eber and Polly White, thus she brought a social tie between land that was to become Eberwhite Nature Area (Eberwhite Elementary School also) and the land in Hiscocks Addition that was to become Belize Park and Hunt Park. Belize Park sits at the heart of Hiscocks Addition (and Hunt Park sits toward the northeastern corner).

**Rights.** Maria Hiscock’s name was on the plat alongside her husband Daniel Hiscock’s name. Both names also are on subsequent deeds to the lots. However, Maria Hiscock was not a legal owner of the land. She had a limited right to it, but she could not legally own it. Coverture laws (stemming from English common-law) barred a married woman from, among other things, owning land or making contracts. Even the land a married woman brought to the marriage became the property of her husband. But the coverture laws granted a married woman ‘dower right’ – as a widow she could during her natural life use 1/3 part of all lands owned by her husband. This right attached to any land her husband owned during the marriage unless she waived her dower right to it.

Maria held dower right to the land in Hiscocks Addition. For the plat she released her dower right to the streets and other public land platted in Hiscocks Addition. The [1859 Plat reads](#):

“And I Maria Hiscock wife of the said Daniel Hiscock do hereby assent to the said Plat and waive and release all right to Dower of in or to the Streets Heighways or public grounds laid down and dedicated therein. In witness whereof we the said Daniel Hiscock and Maria Hiscock have hereunto set our hands and seals at the City of Ann Arbor this tenth day of May AD 1859.” [12]

Michigan was one of many states with coverture laws, and each such state had its own timetable for moving away from them. Statutes supporting coverture and dower in Michigan date back to a 1787 ordinance. Coverture and dower were codified by the Michigan Legislature in 1846.

Intermittent acts of the Michigan Legislature subsequently repealed some of the coverture restrictions. The Married Women’s Property Act of 1855, which the courts interpreted narrowly, allowed a married woman to own property she herself brought into a marriage. The Married Women’s Property Act of 1917 allowed a married woman to make and enter into a contract jointly with her husband to the extent of their joint resources. The Rights and Liability of Married Women Act 216 of 1981 allowed a married woman to make and

enter into a contract on her own or jointly with other people. Though Michigan retained dower longer than any other state in the nation, it abolished it with law 2016 P.A. 489 (effective on April 6, 2017).

**Death.** Maria's dower right came actively into play as her possible support when, in their later years, tragedy struck as her husband Daniel was killed in a train accident. His obituary speaks of the tragedy:

"Mr. Hiscock's tragic death, which occurred on the evening of May 30, 1901, was a great shock to the citizens of Ann Arbor. He was returning in his buggy to the city from a trip which he had made that afternoon into the country, and was crossing the Michigan Central tracks at Whit-more Lake crossing, when the vehicle was struck by a fast express train coming from the west, killing him instantly.

For several years prior to his death, Mr. Hiscock had been afflicted with deafness, and it is generally supposed that he did not hear the approaching train. As a sad coincidence, his son Edward D., was a passenger on the train, but although he learned that a man had been killed, he did not know it was his father until after he got into Ann Arbor...." [13]

Daniel and Maria Hiscock, and their sons Charles and Edward are buried in Forest Hills Cemetery. [14] Street names in the Belize/Hunt Park neighborhood commemorate the family as a whole (Hiscock Street) and the men in the family – Daniel and sons Charles and Edward (Daniel, Charles, & Edward Streets). No street, however, is named for Maria or their daughter Mary.

**A lifetime of experiences.** Daniel Hiscock's obituary sheds light on a variety of lifetime experiences during the 1800s. Born in Pennsylvania in 1819, he was the oldest son of James Hiscock, farmer and soldier of the War of 1812, and Nancy Sprague Hiscock. Both were of English ancestry. They married in Massachusetts then moved to Pennsylvania. Quoting from the obituary:

"When Daniel was about ten years of age, the family set out for Michigan, which territory had been thrown open for settlement only a few years previously, and was still part of the 'Wild West.' The journey, which was made by wagon and a three-horse team, occupied six weeks; and they arrived at their destination October 29, 1829.

During the trip they camped by the wayside lodging two nights in the Maumee swamps. The family located in the woods on section 20, which has long since been forming part of the city of Ann Arbor. James Hiscock engaged in general farming, in which pursuit he continued up to the time of his death. Few of the present generation realize the hardships endured by those early settlers. The broiling sun of summer, causing the rise of vapors from the swamps and virgin soil, pregnant of fever and ague, and the rigors of the long winters were only a part of the tribute which nature exacted from those who conquered the wilderness.

In the family, in addition to Daniel, were six boys and three girls..... Daniel was the eldest of the family. He attended school in Ann Arbor, where educational facilities were not far advanced in those early days. He worked with his father, assisting him to clear the farm; also worked for some time for his neighbors on their farms, and

drove a team of four cattle, says an earlier historian, 'while shaking like a leaf from the ague.'

His father died in 1840 and his mother followed him about ten years later. After the death of his parents, Daniel found it necessary to assume the care of the family. This he did faithfully, caring for the younger children until they were old enough to take care of themselves. The property was then divided among the family...." [13]

While Michigan was still a territory, its land was divided into sections (each section being 1 mile x 1 mile) and patents were 'thrown open' for purchase. In 1824 the founders of Ann Arbor, John Allen and Elisha Rumsay, obtained the patent for Section 29 for what became downtown Ann Arbor. Two years later, in 1826, James Hiscock obtained the patent for the northwest quarter of Section 20. Section 20 is adjacent to and north of Section 29. [15] However, the northwest quarter of it is not adjacent to Section 29, but rather half mile or more from Ann Arbor's original downtown. Most likely it was this northwest quarter of Section 20 that, upon James Hiscock's death, was divided among his children, including Daniel.

Though Hiscocks Addition does lie within Section 20, that land is in the eastern half of the southwest quarter of Section 20. So Daniel did not directly inherit the land that became Hiscocks Addition. He purchased at least part of the land platted in 1859 as Hiscocks Addition in April 1854 from (Reverend) Charles C. Taylor & Henrietta S.T. Taylor, his wife. The deed reads:

"CONVEYS:- All that part of the south east quarter of the south west quarter of section number twenty in town two south, range six east, lying north westerly of the mill race to Ward's Mill. (And other land)." [16]

The original patent for the eastern half of the southwest quarter of Section 20 was obtained by Phineas Silsby in 1825 -- one year before Daniel Hiscock's father's patent for the northwest quarter of Section 20 and one year after Allen and Rumsay's patent for Section 29. [15]

The obituary tells us Daniel Hiscock's farm was on Section 20. The segment of the [1864 map](#) shown in Figure 1 suggests his farm was adjacent to Hiscocks Addition, between its northeastern reaches and Main Street.

### **Streets changing names and shortened**

The east-west street bordering Belize Park has not always been called Summit Street. The 1859 plat labels the street 'High Street', and the [1864 map](#) (see Figure 1) has High Street to the west of Main Street and Summit Street to the east of Main Street. By 1894 High Street had become a western extension of Summit Street, with the [Ann Arbor Argus](#) reporting:

"Daniel Hiscock has completed the construction of his sidewalks on Summit street much to the satisfaction of residents on that thoroughfare." [17]

One street in the area not only changed names but was also shortened due to the steepness of the slope. At the northern edge of [Hiscocks Addition](#) lay Chubb Road -- so called since at

least 1820 for a farmer (and a state representative) who traveled that way from his farm into town.

“Chubb Road descended treacherously to Main, but that section was discontinued when the Toledo and Ann Arbor Rail Road was built along the escarpment.” [11]

In 1927 Chubb Road became Sunset Road, and by 1929 the road’s original eastern end – the treacherous part – that connected directly to Main Street was no where in sight. Instead, Sunset Road connected to a new street called Wildt Street, which ran southwest to meet Summit Street, and Summit Street ran to Main Street. Winter travel on the original steep stretch of Chubb Street must have been quite the harrowing experience.

A street near the treacherous stretch of Chubb Street changed names several times. When Hiscocks Addition was platted in 1859, what is now Daniel Street was then called Grove Street and intersected with Chubb Street at what is now the eastern border of Hunt Park. It was not, however, the only Grove Street in Ann Arbor. The [1864 map](#) shows two Grove Streets – this one and a downtown street that began its course to Ypsilanti at Ann Arbor’s oldest park – Hanover Square (created after 1824 but before 1836) in downtown Ann Arbor. [8]

“Running southward from Chubb Road [Sunset] was one of Ann Arbor’s two Grove streets. Later, because of its approximate alignment, it was called North First. Finally, in 1918, it was renamed Daniel Street, after the same farmer and supervisor whose surname, Hiscock, remains with us in a nearby street of that name.” [11]

The Grove Street at Hanover Square would at some point merge with Packard Street to seamlessly appear as Packard Street.

### **Growing the park while adding affordable housing plus preserving the neighborhood**

The 1970s and 80s saw downtowns throughout America deteriorate, with surviving commercial business moving more and more to city outskirts. Ann Arbor was fortunate in being able to maintain a fair amount of its business at its center. In the early 1990s recognition was given to Ann Arbor’s older near-downtown, largely residential, neighborhoods for their important role in keeping the downtown alive with customers and workers residing close to downtown. With input from residents of the neighborhoods, a Central Area Plan was developed and unanimously approved by both the Planning Commission and the City Council in 1992.

The 1992 Central Area Plan sought

“to ensure that Ann Arbor will remain – well into the future – an interesting mix of people, buildings and things to do....

... The human-size scale of the neighborhoods surrounding the downtown contributes highly to the vitality of Ann Arbor’s core city. The Central Area Plan recognizes that people who live in those neighborhoods have helped keep Ann Arbor alive while other city’s downtowns have turned into wastelands, especially at night. It makes good sense and good policy to protect the integrity and friendliness of these neighborhoods because they are a significant part of the character of Ann Arbor.” [18]

“Down zoning” – reducing the allowable density of housing to be consistent with the character of the neighborhood – was to be undertaken as the first step in the city-wide long-term plan to protect the vitality of the downtown area. The Central Area Plan called for targeting zoning change in areas that were primarily residential but had zoning classifications that could destroy the neighborhood character. The first of the target areas to be addressed was the Belize Park area.

At the time city officials were reported to consider Belize Park’s neighborhood a model of economic and racial integration and one of the few pools of affordable housing in a town where many working here were forced to live elsewhere. Realtor Edward Surovell said of the neighborhood and the possible threat of development:

“They may be modest homes, but they are a high-quality living environment with a stable ethnically, economically and racially diverse population. There is absolutely a risk of future redevelopment, and then Ann Arbor would lose and the citizens least able to take the loss would lose.” [19]

Around 1990 interest by a prospective developer of the Belize Park area had surfaced. The prospective developer obtained an option on the parcel of land adjacent to the park at its eastern border. This parcel was small and narrow but deep and it had a small derelict house sitting on it. A preliminary site plan was submitted calling for seven connected town houses facing the park with garages and driveway behind. In effect this envisioned development was proposing walling in one side of the park and calling the park into service as a front yard for seven condominiums. Given the nature of Belize Park, sitting largely below the surface of the streets on two sides, such a development would have left the park with the feel of being a pit in the ground. Financial gain from condo or apartment developers seeking to build in the area also was of interest to at least one neighborhood resident, George Dodd Jr., who for some time had been buying properties in the area around Belize Park from owners thought to be financially stressed. He was reported in 1993 saying he owned about 11 parcels in the area. [20, 21]

Zoning of the area bordered by the north side of West Summit, Fountain, and Hiscock streets facilitated prospects of development around Belize Park. This was a 3+ block area including Belize Park and contained a total of 79 parcels of land. For reasons not specified in reported activities in the 1990s and hard to identify by that time, zoning for the area had undergone a change in 1968. In that year, the zoning changed to R4C (which allows high-rise, multi-family apartments) while the remaining wider neighborhood remained zoned R2A (allowing single-family and duplex homes). Remarkably, even after the zoning change the 3+ block area had somehow escaped multi-family developments and continued to stand in character with its wider neighborhood as an area of overwhelmingly one- and two-family homes.

But now the parcel at Belize Park’s eastern border, with its vacant house in ruinous condition, was being viewed as prime real estate for development. Interests of neighbors near the park and long-term frequent users of the park, however, differed from those of the prospective developers. The back of the parcel bordering on the park had for a long time effectively been used as part of the park. This added some expanse to the park’s open area

and allowed toddlers to play further away from the streets. With development plans beginning to show signs of life, neighbors and frequent users of the park began efforts in earnest to try to secure the expanded open area for the park and the safety it provided for toddlers plus assure change in zoning from R4C to R2C to preserve the nature of the neighborhood surrounding Belize Park.

Pro-development interests were at odds with the interests of the neighbors and long-term frequent users of Belize Park intent on benefiting the toddler park (as Belize Park was commonly called). Pro-development interests were also at odds with the city's 1992 Central Area Plan. Neighbors and frequent users of the park favoring the zoning change and park purchase of the lot next to Belize Park (organized as the Belize Area Neighborhood Association) submitted petitions and attended meetings of the Parks Advisory Council and public hearings of the Planning Commission. [22] They also went door-to-door and distributed materials to better inform the neighborhood and the users of Belize Park about the issues under discussion. To reach out to the users of Belize Park – the toddler park – they organized ‘The Belize to Hunt Park Stroller Push’ on Sunday, July 7, 1991. This was a fun, non-competitive social and semi-athletic event (given steep slopes) with each entrant pushing their own stroller, or comparable mode of transport, and child from Belize Park up to Hunt Park then looping back down again to Belize Park for a neighborhood party there.

These activities were in part a response to misinformation that was rampant in the neighborhood. Many residents apparently had come to erroneously believe that keeping the R4C zoning would keep the neighborhood from changing.

“An initial petition to rezone the neighborhood R2A was opposed by nearly 40 percent of the residents, [Planning Director] Hart said, and the zoning was put on hold until after the Central Area Plan was adopted.

The planning director said more than half the opposition to the rezoning disappeared once her staff personally contacted everyone they could reach in the neighborhood, explaining that it was the change in zoning that would keep the neighborhood from changing.” [20]

Leading the opposition to the zoning change was the neighborhood resident with around 11 parcels in the R4C-zoned area. He submitted a petition to the Planning Commission to reject the proposed zoning change. The petition was signed by owners of 15 lots in the R4C-zoned area. [20]

The request from the community for the city to purchase the parcel adjacent to Belize Park had undergone extensive discussion along with the zoning issue for some time, being repeatedly discussed and repeatedly tabled. A primary reason given for the city not buying the property was a hope that the historic house would be rehabilitated for use as affordable family housing. Both the neighbors and the city were advocates for affordable family housing so discussion stopped when the house was bought for rehabilitation. Discussion was rekindled when the rehabilitation subsequently failed, the property came up for sale again, and an option was taken by the condo developer as noted above.

The issue of the city purchasing the parcel resolved somewhat sooner than the issue of the zoning change. The city bought the parcel using park millage funds. It retained the back corner as an addition to Belize Park and sold the rest at cost to the Washtenaw Affordable

Housing Corporation to build a duplex for two low-income families. [20, 21] Neighbors had been supportive of affordable family housing at the site, though they had been hoping and working toward the city joining forces with Habitat for Humanity to build affordable family housing that entailed homeownership by low-income families rather than rental arrangements.

A dedication of the expanded park and a ground-breaking ceremony for the duplex was held at Belize Park July 13, 1993. Architect Bruce McCullen, a neighbor living across from Belize Park, on Hillcrest, won a competitive bid to design the modest two-family duplex house that was subsequently built on the site – each family having a three-bedroom-unit with porch and dormer, all in character with the surrounding homes. [21]

That the historical character of Belize Park’s surrounding neighborhood has been retained is in large part owing to the City Council’s zoning decision reached not long after embarking on the joint park-and-affordable-housing venture. On October 4, 1993 City Council made the unanimous decision to “down zone” the Belize Park area to R2A. [23] Behind the Council decision was the 1992 Central Area Plan with its intent to preserve and enhance the existing character of the downtown area, especially older, established neighborhoods, by making zoning changes to reflect each neighborhood’s character. Though the intent of the “down zoning” was initially misunderstood by some, neighborhood residents eventually came together to support the measure.

The local paper reported on the Tuesday following the City Council’s decision:

“Monday’s vote is a victory for both a majority of the neighborhood, which had sought the protection after fighting off a condo developer two years ago, and for the city’s Central Area Plan, which called for the zoning change to reflect the neighborhood’s character....

‘What this vote means,’ said the planning director, ‘is that people in a neighborhood persisted, stuck with the issue, didn’t let the city forget, aired their differences and overcame some misinformation.

‘I think this shows the value of long-range planning in the city. It was a long process, but it shows the process has merit, and it encourages the people to participate’” [23]

Development of the 1992 Central Area Plan and the city’s diligence in due process, plus the persistence of neighbors and users of Belize Park in their mission to safeguard toddlers playing at the park, preserve the park’s surroundings and facilitate affordable family housing, are all to be thanked for the addition to Belize Park flanked by added affordable family housing and preservation of the character of the surrounding neighborhood. In the words of the local paper, this was

“...an unusual cooperative venture that has brought parkland and affordable housing to the hilly neighborhood of older homes.” [21]

It is said that orchards once graced the Fountain Street area across W. Summit Street from Belize Park. Though the orchards are now gone, here in the early 2020s the neighborhood remains one of almost exclusively single-family and duplex homes. Many of the homes are from late 1800s and early 1900s, some recently or just built, and others built between those times. Some are rental houses and many are owner-occupied. Some are modest in size, and some are expansively sized. When it comes to prices, the houses would not be

described as modest. Even longstanding houses are highly valued. In fall 2021 the houses for sale in the Water Hill neighborhood included ones carrying asking prices of over half a million dollars or just under or just over one million dollars. The neighborhood is graced by tall large trees and small newly planted trees all of a wide variety. As befits the plat of Hiscocks Addition with its varying lot sizes, today's neighborhood yards range from quite small to quite large. Some call it a neighborhood of 'unequal yards', and -- as can be seen by the casual viewer walking through the neighborhood -- there is, indeed, great variety in the size of yards. There are also two parks -- Belize and Hunt.

### **Rain garden -- a legacy of a now-invisible brook**

When Belize Park land and its surrounding area became a part of Ann Arbor proper a brook flowed and gurgled its way smack dab through the middle of what is now Belize Park. It ran down hill in a southerly then easterly direction to a mill race paralleling Allen Creek. Though invisible today, signs of this brook are written in the strong flow of rainfall as a stream during heavy rains.

In the small southeast extension of today's Belize Park is a rain garden that, in a sense, is a legacy of that brook. The intention of the rain garden is to capture some of the rainfall runoff, keep it out of residents' basements, and allow the plants to clean the water before it merges with other waters eventually reaching the Huron River.

An early map of the area around today's Belize Park and early deeds for the property reveal a running brook no longer visible to us. In the segment of the [1864 map](#) shown in Figure 1 a small stream or brook can be seen running south down Fountain Street through the lots where Belize Park is now located. The brook then turned southeastward on across Block 7, across Spring Street, through the next block to the east, and shortly afterwards joined with a larger stream, running parallel to Allen Creek. The [1859 plat of Hiscocks Addition](#) labels the stream 'Canal' and it appears to be associated with what is labeled as 'Ward's Mill'.

The presence of the brook in the Belize Park site is corroborated by the first deed for Lots 1 & 3 in Block 7 of Hiscocks Addition, an 1860 assignment with Edward Pardon as the grantee. The deed states:

"All that certain tract or parcel of land situated in Hiscocks addition to the City of Ann Arbor known bounded and described as follows viz.: City Lots one (1) and three (3) in Block number (7)... with the following reservation the Grantors reserve the privilege of using and converting the water in the brook running through said lots in any manner they may think proper...." [24]

So a brook ran in some way through the parcel of land containing lots 1 and 3 of Block 7, with the Hiscocks retaining rights to its waters.

A similar exception and reservation appeared in the 1860 deed Daniel and Maria Hiscock granted to Charles Schulz for Lots 2, 4, and 6 in Block 7. [25] Following the divisions of those lots forward through time reveals no mention of the brook for Lots 2 or 4 but a clear mention of the brook running through lot 6, specifically the south half of lot 6 in Block 7. [26]

An interesting wording change crept into the deed for that south half of Lot 6 in Block 7 when it switched hands in 1888. [27] The exception or reservation in the 1888 deed reads: “moving or diverting from the natural channel” instead of the original “using or diverting”. Probably a clerical error, but interesting to note the added emphasis on relocating the brook. In the 1800s waterways were an important energy source for mills.

An [1870 map](#) shows the brook running across the back corner of Lot 6, then across Lot 8, across Spring Street to Block 12 where it crossed Lots 8 and 9, then across Hiscock Street to join up with a Mill Race paralleling Allen Creek. The Mill Race then apparently ran under Main Street (a plank road at this point) to the block defined by Main Street, Depot Street, and the Michigan Central Rail Road. On that block is Swathe’s Flour Mill. Allen Creek runs through that block as well. [28] Though Ward’s Mill and Canal appear on the 1859 plat of Hiscock’s Addition at the spot where the brook entered the Mill Race, Ward’s Mill does not appear on the 1870 map.

Traces of a brook can now be ‘read’ in the landscape at Belize Park via the lay of the land and the presence of the rain garden in the back southeast extension of the park. Rain gardens, sunken a little into the ground, help slow down and retain rain water and runoff long enough for plants growing in the rain garden to absorb and filter the water, thus cutting down on flooding problems while cleaning the water before it enters the water system.

When the present playground equipment was installed at Belize Park, the nature and design of a rain gardens were largely unknown to most people, including, it seems, contractors installing playground equipment. The brook of the mid-1800s was no longer actively present to guide placement of the rain garden. The contractor dug the ground for the rain garden in roughly, but not exactly, the best location for it serving well. The rain garden was slightly misplaced, so rain runoff was going around it rather than into it.

In 2015 a valiant team of volunteers, including small groups of ninth graders from the YMCA Youth Volunteer Corps through the City of Ann Arbor Adopt-A-Park program, dug and lifted dirt near the rain garden to create a berm to better redirect water flowing down the hill into the rain garden. Helping direct the project were Susan Bryant, Rain Garden Coordinator at Washtenaw County Water Resources Office; Matthew Bertrand and Catie Wytychak Master Rain Gardeners interning there at the time; Marlene McGrath, park steward; Gretchen Mason, Youth Volunteer Corps Coordinator, YMCA Youth Volunteer Corps; and Martha Hill, Master Rain Gardener and neighbor acquainted with problems other neighbors were having with flooded basements. The ninth graders were especially excited by numerous pieces of old trinkets uncovered in the dig, and neighbors and water protectors were especially appreciative of the rain garden better serving its purpose.

The rain garden has been planted with native plants and is tended by the staff in the Washtenaw County Water Resources Office and by associated volunteers. March 2021 saw a controlled burn of the Belize Park rain garden by the Water Resources Office to help native plants thrive (they evolved and are nurtured by being regularly burned).

## **Memories of Belize Park & the Neighborhood**

Merri Walters, resident of Spring Street near Belize Park --

Merri has lived in her house around the corner from Belize Park since she was a child herself, and while raising her own children on through to the present. When asked about memories of Belize Park, without hesitation she vividly shared these memories:

“In the early 80s most of the neighbors on our block [the block containing Belize Park] had fenced-in back yards but their young children loved to play at the park. Parents worried about the dangers of the busy streets. So they came together as a community to help their children get to Belize Park without going near the busy streets. They all agreed to open gaps (just wide enough for a young child to pass through) in their backyard fences so the children had a ‘secret’ passageway to the park entirely away from the busy streets. This agreement held for some time until one of the families got a dog and apologized to the other families but had to seal the gap in their fence.

My oldest son and some of the other boys living on the block often got together at Belize Park to play baseball. Now as then, Belize is a small park far from regulation size for baseball. So the boys got creative and made up their own rules to fit the space. Rule-making was often a large part of the game every time they got together. They couldn’t always agree on the rules, so some pretty loud arguments were a part of the game too.

I also remember a house burning down at the site of Belize Park when I was a girl, and that a woman I did not know died in the fire. It was a huge fire as I remember it, and the house sat down low in the ground.”

Mary Wigton and Ray Anderson, residents of W. Summit Street near Belize Park --

Ray and Mary have lived just a couple of houses from Belize Park since 1985 and raised their boys there. Over the years older neighbors shared with them a variety of memories about the neighborhood. Mary and Ray clearly love talking about the memories and the neighbors who shared them. Neighbors’ memories included orchards on Fountain Street above Belize Park and Buddhist monks living in the house that today still stands next to Belize Park.

Speaking fondly of neighbors, Mary said:

“Calista Wanty and Susan Knox were good friends and neighbors, and I loved to see them out in their gardens together. I remember Calista, often with Susan piping in, telling me things like how Felch Street (east of Spring) was closed when it snowed so it could be a sledding hill. Calista described all the kids being free to roam, but that each had a whistle or bell that called them home. It was a nearby neighbor, Mrs. Walker on Hillcrest, who described old orchards up Fountain just above Belize Park. And the older man in the house that was torn down [next to Belize Park and where the duplex stands today] told us about the stream that ran along the side of where Belize Park is now. I miss these neighbors!”

Also this additional shining memory from Mary:

“Soon after moving to our house near Spring and Summit in 1985, I began noticing how many former corner grocery stores were visible in the neighborhood. Some were still businesses, like Knight’s and Big City Bakery. But the one-time presence of others was more hidden, like the one at 614 Miner that still had ‘Salada Tea’

written on its windows (now the site of Karma Thegsum Choling, a meditation center), one at a property at Brooks and Miller (since torn down), and another in the yard of a house at 504 Hiscock.

As a 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Ann Arbor Open School, I decided to explore the neighborhood corner grocery stores with my students. The story of grocery shopping was part of a bigger history/globalization unit that started with local resources, spread out to world issues, and cycled back. Our research took us to the Local History Room at AADL and examining Sanborn Fire Insurance maps at Bentley. We especially wanted to talk to people who had grown up in the area when these stores were active, though, so we created flyers and distributed them around the neighborhood. We invited anyone who had lived here in the 50s, 60s, or 70s to come to an event at the school. Our cause was greatly assisted by Charles Larkins who grew up in the neighborhood and went to Mack School [former name for Ann Arbor Open School]; he reached out to several of his former classmates. The students wrote up interview questions, baked cookies and brownies... and much to our excitement, people came! It turned out to be a very sweet and memorable evening. We toured the building together hearing about former teachers, hidden stained glass windows, the tower classroom, and they even sang the Mack School song for us. I was so appreciative of the way our guests joyfully shared and interacted with my students. They brought our neighborhood's history alive."

### **Author's Musings**

Streets are amazing. Just imagine all that flows on them... buses, trucks, cars, bicycles, runners, walkers, people coupled with dogs crossing the street to ease the social connection with other people coupled with dogs... and they once flowed with horses, wagons, carriages, buggies. The streets help us connect... one part of town to another part of town, people to stores or libraries or parks or work or restaurants or theaters or symphonies or jazz, children to schools or soccer fields, friends to friends, family to family. We use them most every day, generally without a thought to the service they provide.

We also give streets names. The names help us navigate our way around, and, like the streets themselves, rarely enter our thoughts. How often do we consider where a street name came from, how that came about, what it means? Unlike city lots, our city streets are not sold. They are simply a part of the fabric of the neighborhood and accessible to all, much like Belize Park itself. The streets – public streets --connect the lots and connect the neighborhood to the city.

Streets in the Belize/Hunt Park area reach back to the time when the land became a part of Ann Arbor proper. Among those are several streets commemorating the family – the Hiscock family -- who owned the land. Altogether four streets are named after the Hiscock family -- Daniel, Edward, Charles and Hiscock. Daniel was the proprietor – the owner -- of the land comprising Hiscocks Addition as well as the subsequent Hiscocks Second Addition. Edward and Charles were sons of Daniel and his wife Maria, who also had one daughter, Mary. Edward Street and Charles Street are near Hunt Park and in Hiscocks Second Addition. But what of the women in the family? While the name Mary Street is already taken (it runs between Packard and Hoover), there is no Maria Street in Ann Arbor.

Might we consider evening the playing field here a little with the creation of a Maria Street? Maria's contribution, like that of her husband Daniel, was to relinquish the right to and dedicate the streets to the public. Maria Hiscock waived and released her right to Dower for the land comprising the "Streets Heighways or public grounds laid down and dedicated therein" Hiscocks Addition.

If we were to have a Maria Street, where would it be? One possibility coming to mind is to have it join with other members of the family in the area near Belize Park. It could, indeed, do just that if the name Maria Street were to replace the name Hiscock Street, which lies just to the south of Belize Park. Then Maria Street could reach a curving arm up to Daniel, Edward, and Charles Streets. What do you think? How does this idea sit with you?

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