

VETERANS PARK

AREA 40 acres

BOUNDARIES Dexter of the north
Maple on the west
Jackson on the south
Longman Lane on east

FACILITIES Shelter, picnicking,
softball, coasting, baseball,
playground, outdoor swimming
pool, indoor artificial ice
arena

The Washtenaw County Fair Society has had three locations in the City of Ann Arbor, the first being on or near Forest and Tappan, the second on the site of what is now Burns Park, and the third was a 40 acre piece of land on Jackson Road. By the late 1940s the City of Ann Arbor had grown to such an extent that the County Fairgrounds had become surrounded by residential neighborhoods. Needless to say, livestock shows at the Fairgrounds were not looked upon too favorably by the people living in the immediate vicinity, and so in 1949, the Board of Park Commissioners recommended to the City Council that the Fairgrounds should be studied with the idea of developing the area as a recreation center. This recommendation was supported by the Ann Arbor Board of Education and the Chamber of Commerce. Two committees were set up relative to the use of the Fairgrounds, one appointed by the City Council and the other by the Washtenaw County Board of Supervisors. At the end of 1951, the Washtenaw County Fair Society offered to sell the Fairgrounds to the City of Ann Arbor for the sum of \$127,500.

Council first proposed calling a special election for April 7, 1952 for the purpose of levying a one-mill tax for two successive years for the purchase of the property. Ultimately, Council decided to borrow the sum of \$160,000 and issue general obligation bonds. Of this total \$127,500 was to be used for the purchase of the Fairgrounds and the remaining \$32,5000 was to be used to acquire land for public parks in areas not then provided with parks, or in areas where parks would be required in advance of growth and expansion of the City. This proposition was approved by the voters and Council accepted the offer of the Fair Society to sell the site for the sum of \$127,500. The

Deed between the Washtenaw County Fair Society and the City of Ann Arbor is dated December 22, 1953 for an area of 39.75+ acres. (Liber 654 Page 432).

A combined committee of members appointed by the Washtenaw County Fair Society and the Ann Arbor City Council was requested to formulate a cooperative plan for the development of the Fairgrounds property.

The Fair Society set aside some \$70,000-\$75,000 of the money from the sale of the property, for the purpose of erecting a building to house the 4-H Club, agricultural and other organizations, to act as a youth recreation center. As part of this project the Washtenaw Farm Council leased from the City of Ann Arbor six acres of the land they had sold to the City, for a period of 99 years at a cost of \$15,000 on which they proposed to erect this building. The preliminary plans for this building by architect Ralph S. Gerganoff of Ypsilanti called for a 180 x 130 ft. two-story brick, steel and concrete building containing an arena on the second floor for the showing of livestock, with bleachers for 2,500 people, as well as an exhibition hall for displaying projects by 4-H members. The lower floor of the building was to contain offices, a snack bar and an apartment for a caretaker. The Farm Council proposed to finance this project by the use of the money it had held in trust from the sale of the Fairgrounds, and to conduct an extensive fund raising campaign for the remainder from industry, farm and private groups interested in 4-H work.

The original estimate of \$2,000,000 for the activities building at one time reached the sum of \$2,700,000 which caused much concern for the Farm Council, who had anticipated having to raise \$1,000,000 but not \$2,000,000. Concern was also felt about the location of such a rural activities building in the City, since it was the opinion of some that, although Ann Arbor was the County seat, the City itself was not much oriented towards rural interests. Finally, the plans for this particular project were abandoned, and the City bought back from the Farm Council the 99 year lease, and refunded the \$15,000 to them. The Farm Council in turn paid the City \$856 for their share of the County drain, and \$1,000 for the dirt fill. After much deliberation, the Farm Council bought land and set up new facilities for itself at its present location in Saline.

While discussions were going on about the 4-H building, space was needed by the various rural groups for their activities, consequently arrangements were made between the City Council and the Washtenaw Farm Council to permit four buildings, i.e., the merchants building and three stock barns, along the eastern side of the park property to remain standing until September 1956, at which time they were to be razed. The use of the buildings was limited to the 4-H Fair and the Junior Chamber of Commerce's Annual Builders Show. In July, 1956, Council resolved to accept the bid from the Central Wrecking Company of Lansing of \$5,360 for complete removal of the four buildings. A month later Council passed another resolution allowing the exhibit building to remain temporarily at Veterans Park since no structure existed for its replacement. The Junior Chamber of Commerce agreed to repair, paint and clean the building. However, when an estimate was made of the cost of this work, it was decided not to proceed with it.

In April 1955, the Fairgrounds was named Veterans Memorial Park in honor of the Veterans of all Wars.

Simultaneous with the Farm Council's proposal for the 4-H building, the City of Ann Arbor was making plans to develop Veterans Memorial Park as a recreation center. This center was to cost 2½ million dollars, and to contain a swimming pool, skating rink and facilities for a variety of entertainment shows. The arena of the main structure was to have 4,000 permanent seats, the structure would also contain offices, concessions, dressing rooms and storage space. The architectural firm of Colvin, Robinson and Associates were asked to prepare plans, costs and perspective drawings for this proposed center.

It was thought that the center would be self-supporting, and actually net about \$5,000 annually. However, a representative from a research and consulting organization, the National Recreation Association, told the City that the center was more likely to have operating expenses in the region of \$200,000 annually, and an operating deficit of about \$100,000. The proposition for financing the structure was placed before the electors on May 22, 1956, and was defeated.

From 1957 on, a steady program of staged development was started for Veterans Memorial Park. The sum of \$4,695 was appropriated in the late 1958 to cover the cost of making three

ball diamonds ready for play in the summer of 1959, and the \$1,500 which had been previously contributed by the Junior Chamber of Commerce was used to erect two new backstops. The following year the Electric Service Company was paid \$35,900 for installing poles and floodlights at one baseball and one softball diamond. By 1963, there were five ball diamonds in Veterans Memorial Park. They were in use from April to October with some 40 games and 4,000 people there each week during the peak season and lesser but still sizeable gatherings at other times. In winter, the topography drew large numbers for sledding, and the natural skating rinks averaged 85 skaters a day, which, during a favorable 60 day season amounted to 5,000 skaters. The heavy use of this park necessitated the building of a shelter there. The architectural firm of Wong and Chance designed the building, the contractors were Don Butcher Building Company, and the total cost was \$37,725. It had 4567 sq. feet (104' x 44') under roof, 889 sq. feet enclosed permanently, 747 sq. feet enclosed by panel inserts. This pavilion type shelter had rest rooms, fireplace, storage and concession rooms. The shelter was dedicated on March 22, 1964. It has been used as a skating shelter in the winter and for organized recreation and picnic activities in the summer. The construction of two tennis courts was authorized in November 1964 at a cost of \$12,000 including lighting. These tennis courts were later removed to facilitate the construction of the new ice arena entrance plaza and parking lot.

In April 1966 a 2.5 million General Obligation Bond issue was authorized, part of which was used for the construction of skating rinks and swimming pool facilities at Buhr, Fuller and Veterans Park. The three skating rinks/tennis courts were constructed by Charles Beltz & Co., for the sum of \$364,000. The swimming pool and bath house at Veterans Memorial Park were constructed by the Minion Construction Company at a cost of \$339,757. In 1969, concrete walkways were provided along Veterans Park on the north side of Jackson Road to the existing walk on Jackson Place, and an asphalt walk across Veterans Park from the Dexter/Maple intersection to the Pool.

The shelter at Veterans Park was destroyed by fire as a result of arson on February 8, 1971. The shelter was almost completely gutted and required a job of major reconstruction. Architects

Wong and Associates and the O'Neal Construction Company were responsible for this work. The total cost was \$45,161 of which amount \$25,000 was Insurance deductible.

It was decided to enclose the artificial skating rink at Veterans Memorial Park, and in 1971 the City of Ann Arbor sought the approval of the Building Authority for financing the enclosing of this rink through the sale of their bonds. Upon their approval, and that of the State Finance Commission, the City entered into a 40 year lease agreement with the Building Authority to cover the estimated cost of \$675,000 for the project. The annual rentals to be paid on July 15, each year beginning July 15, 1973. The architects for the arena were Colvin, Robinson, Wright and Associates at a fee of 7.4% of the total cost of the building, and the contractors on the job were Saline Construction Company, Fel-Kran Plumbing and Heating Company, and Gray Electric Company. The final cost of the ice arena construction was \$528,672.13.

The following equipment was also purchased for the arena out of the \$675,000 Bond issue:

Zamboni Ice Resurfacing Machine	\$11,881.28
Food Warmer	53.50
Key Cabinet	60.20
Popcorn Popper	826.00
Icemaker	2260.00
Freezer	885.00
Hot Dog Warmer	99.10
Bun Warmer	114.45
Drink Dispenser	350.00
Skate Sharpener	730.00
Vinyl letters for Ice Rink	302.47
Sheets for Hockey Dasher Boards	2787.84

The First year interest payment was \$60,150.00

The balance of the funds have been devoted to site improvements, such as drives and parking lots, required to service the arena.

In establishing a permanent ice arena at Veterans Park, the tennis courts were eliminated. These will be relocated in the Park in the near future, and Federal funding has been requested for this purpose.

Veterans Memorial Park is unique in the State as a recreational complex, because of all the activities offered there.

The swimming pool has just completed its fifth year of operation, during which time some 200,000 people have used it. The newly enclosed ice arena has been operating for nearly a year, and its acceptance by the community has exceeded all original estimates. Nearly 150,000 people used the facility last winter, and the summer of 1973 was the first time ever in the history of Ann Arbor that summer ice was available, approximately 40,000 people used the facility.

Veterans Memorial Park continues to be a favorite for those enthusiasts who follow the various ball playing leagues. Its proximity to the expressway system, overnight accommodations and shopping centers, plus the other recreational facilities make it popular with those following the tournament circuit also. The Park presently features three baseball diamonds (two 90' and one 75'), also two 60' softball diamonds; all diamonds are lighted for evening play. The present seating capacity is placed at 1280 and is soon to be increased. Scheduled play up to four games per diamond each evening is now the practice, with some three day tournaments featuring 47 games on three diamonds; season games approximate 1000.

At the base of the flag pole west of the shelter in Veterans Memorial Park is a commemorative plaque which reads:

This Memorial
has been placed as
a tribute to
JACK DRAKE
in appreciation of his
leadership and for his
outstanding service to
the recreation program

The Park also contains the following equipment:

Swings7
Stage Coach Climber1
Spring Horse 1
Wigwam Climber 1
4 Section Balance Bar 1
Pedestrian Walk 1
Cookers 3

Bleachers 22
Scoreboards 2
Flag Pole with Plaque 1
Scorer's stand 1
Bike Rack 1
Signs 2
Softball diamonds 2
Baseball diamonds 3
Shelter with fireplace and planter box
Drinking fountains 3
Sledding area
Ice Arena