JOHN BALL PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT
JANUARY 2002

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I *Charge of the Committee*

By a resolution dated June 27, 2000 the Grand Rapids City Commission named the John Ball Park Historic District Study Committee in accordance with Chapter 68 of Title V of the City Code and the Michigan Local Historic District Act, PA 169 (1970), as amended.

City Code Chapter 68, Sec. 5.392 provides that the purpose of this Chapter is to:

1) Safeguard the heritage of the City of Grand Rapids by preserving districts which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history, and to preserve Historic Landmarks,
2) Stabilize and improve property values in such districts, and
3) Foster civic beauty.

Under Section 5.398 of the Grand Rapids City Ordinance the Study Committee is charged to undertake the following actions:

1) Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within the proposed John Ball Park Historic District following procedures established by the Michigan Historic Preservation Office;
2) Conduct basic research on the historic resources located within the proposed district;
3) Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within the proposed district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the study committee shall be guided by the selection criteria for evaluation issued by the United States Secretary of the Interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places, as set forth in 36 CFR §60;
4) Prepare a preliminary historic district study committee report;
5) Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendation to the Grand Rapids Planning Commission, the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Commission, the State Historic Preservation Officer, the Michigan Historical Commission, and to the Michigan Historic Preservation Review Board. Copies of the preliminary report shall be made available to property owners in the proposed historic district and to the general public;

6) Hold a public hearing in compliance with the Open Meetings Act not less than sixty (60) calendar days after the transmittal of the preliminary report;
7) Prepare and submit a final report with recommendations for the designation of the historic district to the Grand Rapids City Commission, which may, at its discretion, act on the recommendations of the Study.

II *Composition of the Committee*

Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Commission

Herbert Ranta
Jennifer Metz (36 CFR 61 certified)

Grand Rapids Planning Commission

Peter Carlberg

Kent County Council for Historic Preservation

Rebecca Smith-Hoffman (36 CFR 61 certified)

Members at Large

Phyllis Ball
Representative of the Ball family; member of John Ball Zoological Society
Robert Everett
Researcher and writer
Don Marek
Historian, Grand Rapids furniture industry; author of *Arts and Crafts Furniture Design: The Grand Rapids Contribution, 1895-1915* and *Grand Rapids Art Metalwork*
Rev. Dennis Morrow
Archivist, Diocese of Grand Rapids; Pastor, SS. Peter and Paul Church; urban historian; contributor to *Gathered at the River: Grand Rapids, Michigan, and its People of Faith*

With the assistance of

Local History Department Staff
Grand Rapids Public Library
William Cunningham, Archivist
City of Grand Rapids
Jack L. Hoffman
Dr. Carl Bajema

Photography by

Jennifer Metz
Rebecca Smith-Hoffman

III *Study Area*

John Ball Park, the first large, multi-use park in Grand Rapids, has been a source of great pride to the community since 1884. Before the advent of the automobile and television, Grand Rapids had a rich public social life. All of its citizens flocked to the park during the summer to picnic on its broad lawns, to enjoy the free band concerts, and to stroll along its shady forest paths. Its swimming pool provided relief from summer heat in the days before air-conditioning. In the winter, the park offered skating and sledding. Opening day ceremonies at the park each year drew thousands and were considered to be so important that city employers gave their workers a half-holiday to allow them to attend. The annual Easter egg roll, Fourth of July celebrations, hymn sings, family reunions, company picnics, field days, athletic events, all drew residents and visitors to John Ball Park. Grand Rapids residents and visitors continue to view the park as an important element of the city's public life.

Forty acres of land donated to the city by John Ball, known as the "Ball Forty", formed the nucleus around which John Ball Park grew. Ball's intention to donate the land was public knowledge from 1869 when his will was written. Although the park did not officially become city property until Ball's death in 1884, the site was a popular gathering place and informal recreation ground long before it became part of the city's park system. When the city chose to accept Ball's gift, which lay outside the city limits at the time, it also chose to improve Fulton Street. The street car line reached the park in 1892. Not only did these improvements provide greater public access to the park, they also encouraged the westward development of the city. Land around the park became highly desirable residential property. Between 1884 and 1932, the area of the park was gradually increased to 142 acres through subsequent property purchases by the city and gifts of land from private citizens. Construction of the I-196 expressway (completed in 1964) through the northwest corner of the park reduced it to approximately 110 acres.

The physical development of John Ball Park is a manifestation of Grand Rapids' participation in the awakening of the national conscience and in the resulting social movements that swept the country during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Recognition of the need for public space in the industrialized city gave impetus to the nineteenth century park movement and led to the development of large public parks in most American cities. Large areas of park land, viewed as a necessary amenity in a desirable community, were believed to enhance worker productivity, civic patriotism, and to encourage economic development and community growth. The City Beautiful movement inspired citizen efforts to refashion the city into a beautiful, functional entity. It brought an appreciation of the value of city planning and urban design in the effort to improve the environment – "to bring the rich man's advantage to the poor man's door."

The spatial organization of the park and the extant facilities reflect the major park design themes: pastoral scenery, public horticulture, recreation, zoo development, public works programs of the depression era, and memorialization.

IV *Boundary Description and Justification*

The John Ball Park study area is described as beginning at the corner of West Fulton Street and Valley Avenue; then west to John Ball Park Drive NW; then north to the Gerald R. Ford Freeway (I-196); then along the freeway to Butterworth Street SW; then east to John Ball Park Drive SW; then north to Park Street SW; then east to valley Avenue SW; then north to the place of beginning.

In most instances the original boundaries of the landscape design will define the limits of the geographic area to be evaluated.[1] The proposed district boundary encompasses the area of the park within the period of significance.

IV. *History of the Proposed District*

V(A) Category and Type[2]

The category is historic site – cultural landscape. The type is historic designed landscape – local city park.

V(B). *Historic Context*

John Ball Park is an early example of the public urban "country park." As a "country park" it was designed to "evoke the visitor's memory of rural scenes and his instinctive attraction to nature with its pastoral, softly meandering tree-formed space."[3]

Victoria Park in London and Birkenhead Park in Liverpool, both developed in 1841, were the first recorded parks owned by and open indiscriminately to the people. Ten years later the New York Legislature passed the First Park Act authorizing the creation of Central Park, the first true public park in the Western Hemisphere. In terms of park design, Central Park had decisive significance. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1857, Central Park was "carried out, like Birkenhead but with far greater skill, as a 'country park'."[4] In her *History of Garden Art* (1920), Marie Gotheim defined the four principles of Olmsted's designs: 1) avoid formal design except in very limited areas about building, 2) keep open lawns and meadows in large central areas, 3) provide circulation by means of organically curving and wide sweeping roads and paths, 4) place the principle road so that it will approximately circumscribe the whole area. Olmsted's vision dominated American urban park design for the next one hundred years.

Development of the urban public park in the Midwest United States began in 1864 with the creation of Lake (now Lincoln) Park in Chicago. However, the true impetus for

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[1] National Register Bulletin (NRB), No. 18:6.

[2] NRB 15, Sec III(1). Categorize the property. NRB 18 (2). Identify the appropriate landscape type. The property is significant both as a designed historic landscape (NRB 18, "a landscape consciously designed and laid out by a master gardener or landscape architect to a design principle.") and as a site significant in the social and cultural history of the local unit of government.

[3] Newton, Norman T. *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture,* p 267-269.

[4] Newton, op cit.

Midwestern urban park design came in 1869 with the passage of the Illinois Park Commission Act and the creation of the Chicago West and South Park Commissions, which retained Olmsted and his associate Calvert Vaux as designers. In that same year, John Ball wrote his will leaving forty acres to the city of Grand Rapids "for a Public Park, or other public uses only."

Olmsted designed Belle Isle Park in Detroit in 1881; three years later Grand Rapid acquired its first public park by the death of John Ball. Beginning in 1893, the Midwest achieved major influence in American public park design with the creation of the Great White City at the World's Colombian Exposition held in Chicago that year. The exposition design team was chaired by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, with park design under the supervision of Olmsted. The influence of the Great White City on American architecture, city planning and park design has been incalculable, but was at its height during the period of the City Beautiful movement, from 1893 until the 1920s.

Building on the national impact of the exposition, Daniel Burnham and Company pioneered the concept of the city plan, subsequently developing plans for Washington, D.C., Cleveland, San Francisco, Manila and Chicago. Another major planning firm active in the City Beautiful movement was Brunner and Carrère (Arnold W. Brunner and John M. Carrère) of New York City.[5] Brunner and Carrère designed the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo and collaborated with Burnham on the Cleveland plan of 1903. Among other significant projects, including city plans for Hartford and Baltimore, Brunner and Carrère authored the 1909 Grand Rapids city plan based upon City Beautiful principles.[6]

Olmsted's design principles for an urban "country park", as interpreted through the City Beautiful movement, were implemented by John Ball Park designer Eugene Goebel beginning in 1910, one year after he collaborated with Brunner and Carrère on the 1909 city plan. The Goebel design and the concept of the urban "country park" were the dominant influence on John Ball Park design for the next fifty years and remain the defining characteristics of the park as it exists today.

Another influence on Midwestern park design during this period also came from Chicago – the Prairie School of landscape design, which may be said to have begun with the appointment of Grand Rapids native Ossian Simonds as Superintendent of Graceland Cemetery in Chicago in 1881. Simonds was, along with Jens Jensen of Chicago, the father of the Prairie Landscape Design movement. An 1878 graduate of the University of Michigan, he founded its School of Landscape Design. Among numerous public and private projects, Simonds designed Nichols Arboretum ("The Arb") in Ann Arbor in

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[5] See generally Hines, Thomas S., *Burnham of Chicago: Architect and Planner.*

[6] *Grand Rapids Press*, 22 May 1909. The connection between City Beautiful park design and Olmsted is described by William H. Wilson in *The City Beautiful Movement*, p 86-87: "City Beautiful aesthetics, considered separately from City Beautiful ideology, linked natural beauty, naturalistic constructivism, and classicism. Reverence for natural beauty and for naturalistic constructivism, its urban counterpart, stands first in the order of City Beautiful aesthetics. The priority may seem misplaced, given the traditional linking of the City Beautiful with neoclassical forms. When we examine what City Beautiful adherents really were thinking and doing, however, we find a reality richer than the neoclassic. It was no accident, as Henry Hope Reed, Jr. remarked, that the scenic preservation and urban beautification movements burst upon the country at the same time. There were precedents, including the rural cemetery movement and [Andrew Jackson] Downing's call for ruralized homes. Olmsted personified the joining of rural preservation and managed conservation with the drive for urban beauty."

1907. While following Olmsted design principles and the theory of the country park, Simonds and Jensen emphasized the use of the Midwestern (particularly the prairie) landscape as a design theme, using native Midwestern plant species. Jensen especially emphasized low horizontal plantings, such as hawthorns and crabapples, to enhance the prairie effect.

A third major influence on park design was the American Playground movement, which reached the height of its influence with the creation of the Playground Association of America in 1906. Playground theory emphasized the importance of parks and active recreation for the physical and mental health of lower income citizens, especially children. Since the urban "country park" movement emphasized the restorative benefits of urban parks, country parks such as John Ball made a neat fit with playground theory in that play spaces could be inserted in the fields, meadows, glades and groves called for by Olmsted design principles, without seriously impairing the design intent. Charles Garfield of Grand Rapids was a national leader in the playground movement and the Association held its tenth annual meeting in Grand Rapids in 1916, attended by 1200 playground leaders from across the nation.[7]

The urban country park went into decline with the rise of the automobile after World War II. Norman Newton, in his authoritative *Design on the Land: the Development of Landscape Architecture* (1971) described the new urban country park as a rarity.[8] Newton lamented the loss. "There are those who assert that the 'country park', with its pastoral, softly meandering tree-formed space, is no longer needed within the city in view of the relative nearness of countryside in this motor age. This is undoubtedly one reason for diminished popular demand, considering numerical terming at least. Psychologically, however, under the tensions, pressures, and incessant clamor of the hectic urban condition, there is even greater need today for the quick relief of the quiet, contemplative atmosphere of the quasi-rural 'country park.' And to assume glibly that the countryside is 'near at hand for everybody' – a statement frequently heard – is a cruel exaggeration; it will continue to be so until public transportation to the open country is freely or at least reasonably available to the lowest-income urban population."

Since reaching low ebb in the 1970s, appreciation of the significance of historic landscapes has undergone a renaissance. The increasing depredations of the automobile and auto-oriented development on the American landscape have led to a reaction in the anti-sprawl, urban revitalization, and historic preservation movements. The National Trust for Historic Preservation published *Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places* in 1989. Shortly thereafter the National Park Service formed the Historic Landscape Initiative to promote "responsible preservation practices that protect our nation's irreplaceable legacy – designed landscapes such as parks and gardens, as well as vernacular historic landscapes such as farms and industrial sites."[9]

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[7] *Grand Rapids Herald*, 30 September 1916:6.

[8] Newton, op cit., p 621.
Newton is the standard source for American landscape history. National Park Service (NPS) Preservation Brief (PB) 36.

[9] NPS, *Historic Landscape Initiative*, p 1.

John Ball Park is significant in the context of local[10] Grand Rapids history, culture, and architecture in the areas of landscape architecture, conservation, community planning and development, public health, politics/government, and social history.[11]

V(C) *Characteristics of the Type*[12]

In order to be a good representative of its landscape type, an American urban "country park" of the era 1851-1952 should avoid formal design except in very limited areas about buildings, keep open lawns and meadows in large central areas, and provide circulation by means of organically curving and wide sweeping roads and paths. Open space should be pastoral, softly meandering, and tree-formed. Landscape design should emphasize natural Midwestern forms and plantings should emphasize such native Midwestern plants as will thrive in a park environment and contribute to the design intent. Playgrounds, recreational facilities, and other structures should be integrated into the naturalistic meadows, fields, glades, groves, and ravines called for by the natural design.

V(D) *Period of Significance*

The period of significance for John Ball Park is 1884 to 1952. The National Register of Historic Places uses fifty years ago as the closing date for the period of significance where activities begun historically continue to have importance. Events and activities occurring within the last fifty years must be exceptionally important to be recognized as "historic" and to justify extending a period of significance beyond the limit of fifty years ago. This study is a snapshot in time and the period of significance of John Ball Park will continue to extend forward long after its completion.

V(E) *Description of the Proposed District*[13]

V(E)(1) *Natural Landscape Features*[14]

John Ball Park lies one mile from the west bank of the Grand River at the point where the Grand River bluffs rise abruptly 150 feet from the river terrace. The bluffs are a prominent natural feature of western Lower Michigan and stretch in almost unbroken lines on both sides of the Grand River for over fifty miles from Portland west to Grand Rapids.

The bluffs are glacial end moraines. These are long ridges formed when an ice front is stationary for a number of years. Since glacial ice typically flows, a stationary ice front forms where the amount of melt during the summer balances the amount of ice that flows

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[10] "A local historic context represents as aspect of the history of a town, city, county, cultural area, our region, or any portions thereof." NRB 15, Sec. V.

[11] NRB 15, Sec. V.

[12] NRB 18(3).

[13] NRB 18(1).

[14] See generally Dorr & Eschman, *Geology of Michigan;* Veatch, *Soils and Land of Michigan;* Ferrard & Bell, *Quaternary Geology of Southern Michigan* (map).

in from behind during the winter. The ice flowing into the front is mixed with silt, clay, sand, gravel and boulders, picked up as the ice moved over the earth's surface. This mixture is called moraine and it accumulates in ridges at stationary fronts. As the climate warms and the amount of melt in summer exceeds the flow of ice in winter, the ice front retreats until a temporary stabilization of the climate establishes a second front and second end moraine further back.

Fifteen thousand years ago, the Grand Rapids region was covered with a sheet of flowing ice several thousand feet thick. In this area the center of pressure lay in the Lake Michigan basin and the direction of flow was west to east. With a change in climate and the retreat of the ice, the front retreated in the opposite direction, east to west. The front temporarily stabilized just east of the present Grand River and an end moraine, forming the present Belknap Hill and Heritage Hill, was laid down. With continued warmer climate the ice front again retreated, stabilizing one and a half miles to the west to form the end moraine that constitutes the present John Ball Park bluffs.

The drift, or glacial deposit, which composes the bluffs is sandy, reddish in color and contains scattered boulders, but is not excessively stony. The red tone comes from traces of iron in the soil, sandstone, and conglomerates picked up and transported by the glacier from the Lake Superior Basin. In physical form the bluffs are a complex highland. The bluffs as laid down by the glacier are curved and rounded in form, giving a softened aspect to the landscape. However, the relatively young drainage system combined with the, for lower Michigan, relatively high relief, has resulted in the bluffs being dissected by short, sharp ravines and draws at the edge where the bluffs meet the plain. John Ball Park has three of these ravines: the north ravine, which is now the right of way for Lake Michigan Drive, the middle ravine, which is the site of the existing zoo, and the south draw, formerly the site of the boys' swimming pond.

The high elevations of the bluffs within the site are the North Knob, north of Lake Michigan Drive; the Middle Knob between the North and Middle Ravines; and the South Knob, between the Middle Ravine and the South Draw. The South Knob rises directly from the river terrace. The Middle Ridge separates the Middle Knob from the terrace. Access to the North and Middle Knobs is limited. The South Knob is accessible by road and trail. During the summer, views from the South Knob are limited by foliage, but from late fall to spring it offers spectacular views of the East Bluffs, downtown Grand Rapids, and the West Side churches.

The gap between the east and west bluffs formed a natural drainage way to the southwest that was filled as soon as it was formed by the Glacial Grand River, which lasted for about two thousand years beginning about thirteen thousand years ago. The Glacial Grand River exceeded the present river in width, depth and volume many times over. There were three reasons for this. First, the glacier still blocked the outlet to the Atlantic through the St. Lawrence valley. Thus, all the water that now flows through the Niagara River then flowed west through the Grand to the Mississippi by way of the Chicago outlet. Second, the volume of water deriving from the glacial melt was added to the normal rainfall. Third, the level of Lake Michigan was up to thirty feet higher than it is

now with the bed of the Grand correspondingly higher, the mouth of the Grand then being near Allendale. In short, the river at that time must be pictured as a torrent of icy, muddy water the entire width between the present bluffs, with ice fields stretching to the north and west. The present river terrace represents the stratified and sorted sand and gravel which formed the bed and flood plain of the glacial river. The lowering of the outlet level by the retreat of the glacier past the Niagara outlet lowered the level of Lake Michigan. As a result, the now much reduced Grand River cut down through its former bed to its present level, leaving the former bed as a terrace about thirty feet above the existing river. The surface of the terrace is flat and uniform, with little or no relief.

The line where the terrace meets the bluff is clearly traceable and was used as a defining visual feature in the 1909-1910 Goebel park design. The wooded bluffs in the Goebel plan remain essentially as intended throughout the three quarter mile length of the site. Indeed, the growth of the vegetation over time was planned for in the Olmsted theory of park design to which Goebel adhered. Prior to the Goebel plan and continuing to the present, the middle ravine and its tributary draws to the north have likewise played a defining role in the park design.

The original vegetation on the bluffs was an old growth hardwood forest of oak, elm, and maple.[15] The river plain from Straight Street to the foot of the bluffs was the Gunnison swamp, often forming a lake during the spring floods.[16] Dredging and filling during park development created the existing prairie landscape of meadow and pond. The original vegetation in the swamp comprised the river flood plain and bottom land community.[17]

The bluffs extend north-northeast through the park and the original "Ball Forty" was almost all bluff with the exception of the southeast corner where the south pond is today. Subsequent purchases to the south and east added substantial amounts of level terrace land suited to recreational field uses. The facilities and features occupying the terrace land today are, from south to north, the ball fields and tennis courts; the meadow, the south pond, and playground; the band shell, the pavilion, the main parking lot, picnic grove and soccer field; and the north parking lot, picnic shelter, north pond, and landscaped drives.

V(E)(2) *Designed Landscape Features*

The design framework that underlies the existing park and zoo areas was laid out during the superintendence of Eugene Goebel (1909-1928). A comparison of Goebel's program statement in 1910 with the principles of Olmsted park design is revealing. In that year a perceptive *Grand Rapids Press* reporter described Goebel's design intent as follows: "Taking the rolling hills and the bigness and spirit of nature as his motive Superintendent of Parks Eugene Goebel is making the entire new plan of decoration to conform to the breadth and natural beauty of the park. The approaches are not to look like a bit of artificial decoration tacked on to the park, but will be a continuation of the natural beauty

[15] *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, 28 October 1891.

[16] *Grand Rapids Herald*, 12 July 1953:1-Part 2.

[17] Barnes and Wagner, *Michigan Trees* (1982).

and will preserve the harmony of the whole."[18] Goebel's interpretation of natural beauty in terms of Olmsted's principles is evident in the existing east and south meadows, the organically curving drives and walks, and the studied avoidance of formal design arrangement of the vegetation except in limited areas around buildings.

Goebel's 1910 design statement for the park echoes the observation of planners Brunner and Carrère on Grand Rapids' topography: "Because of its hills, its wide river valley, and its small creek valleys, Grand Rapids possesses all the elements of the picturesque."[19] An appreciation for the native Midwestern topography remained throughout the defining element of the Goebel design.

The 1910 *Press* article noted above continues, "But just now the approaches to the park look as if some farmer were doing his spring plowing. The slope of the hill that had queer designs wrought in flowers and foliages and disported floral flags, flocks and things such as the wildwood never knew is all plowed up. They are changing the grade to make is slope naturally to the roadway. . . The conventional and ornamental flower gardens will be grouped about the new pavilion which stands on the site of the old greenhouses which have been carted away. A large lagoon now lies at the south of the pavilion, but when the improvements are in all completed, an artificial lake will cover a large area of the McNamara addition affording a beautiful waterfront to the pavilion while the south side of the building commands a sweeping panoramic view of the hills of John Ball. These hills are more beautiful in their natural outlines than any design of a landscape gardener could be and the new scheme of decoration will add to their dignity and beauty. The lagoon and the artificial lake will be bordered with trees and shrubs and will afford the attractiveness of water which John Ball Park has lacked. In short, the park will be up to date and metropolitan with nature as the dominating motive."

Goebel's work continues to the present to be the dominant motive in the landscape plan. The pavilion with its views to the south of the prairie meeting the line of wooded bluffs remains today, as do the north and south ponds with their plantings. Soil excavated from the pond basins was used as fill to raise the level of the plane and eliminate the swamp. The artificial lake was never completed and instead the McNamara tract was developed according to Olmsted principles as the East Meadow, which also exists today in substantially its original concept; likewise the south meadow with its playgrounds, ball fields, and tennis courts. The rose garden to the north of the pavilion represents Goebel's retention of formal ornamental arrangements in proximity to the building.

Goebel also designed the motif of grassy meadow meeting forested bluffs, which remains a dominate design feature of the current park. Goebel described his design intent in this respect as follows: "One, who is even the most casual student of landscape effects, appreciates the fact that variety is the keynote of beauty in nature. A broad, unending level stretch grows monotonous in time, no matter how delightful may be its first immersion. Hills and mountains, too, seem twice as grand and imposing, the immensity is much more keenly appreciated, when the lowlands at the base may be included in the

[18] *Grand Rapids Press*, 28 March 1910:2.
[19] *Grand Rapids Press*, 22 March 1909:11.

perspective, to enhance by contrast their magnitude."[20] Vistas from the east of the forested bluffs of John Ball Park remain to the present as a defining characteristic of the Grand Rapids central city, including Heritage Hill, the Downtown, and the Westside.

Goebel described his design intent for drives and walks as follows: "Another radical change is in the outline of the driveways. According to the new plan the main drive will skirt the east slope of the entire park sweeping gracefully about the natural curves at the foot of the hills. The new drive affords an entrance at the north which will extend around the park and will border the athletic field instead of cutting through it as it now does and will climb the hill at the south joining the park road and making a continuous circuit."[21] Existing components of the drives include the curved drive from Fulton Street to Park Street and the curved drive from Valley Avenue up through the middle ravine where it becomes incorporated in the zoo as the existing service drive and pedestrian path. The view from the east of the drive winding up through the ravine remains a significant design vista. A recently reconstructed component of the Goebel design is the hilltop drive up through the bluffs from the south.

Subsequent to Goebel's tenure, Olmsted-inspired design for roadways continued to be evident in the naturalistic curves and plantings of the original 1928 cut through the park for Lake Michigan Drive. This portion of Lake Michigan Drive is extant in a substantial fragment although the western half was radically altered to accommodate the cut in the early 1960s for the I-196 freeway. The cut through the bluffs was designed to coordinate with the City Beautiful-inspired wide, straight segment of Lake Michigan Drive extending east from the park to downtown. The view east from the North Knob along the drive to downtown and the view west along the drive to the bluffs are significant existing vistas.

It is worthy of mention that the designers of the federal Interstate Highway System relied in an ultimately ironic way on Olmsted design in terms of organically curved roadways and naturalistic plant groupings. Indeed, the particular cut of I-196 through and around the park displays one of the memorable vistas of the Michigan interstate system, which is the curving descent from the west bluffs with its highly charged long view of the central city silhouetted against the east bluffs.

The extent to which Goebel was influenced specifically by Prairie School landscape design principles is undecided, but some connection is plausible. Goebel first rose to prominence in the Grand Rapids park system as Superintendent of Oakwood Cemetery. In the first decade of the twentieth century Jens Jensen published fairly extensively in such publications as *Park and Cemetery,* e.g. the article "The Symmetrical and the Natural Flower Garden" (No. 7, September 1900). Also, Ossian Simonds served as the first dean of the University of Michigan's Department of Landscape Design and his 1907 design for the Nichols Arboretum ("The Arb") in Ann Arbor clearly prefigures Goebel's later design for the treatment of the John Ball bluffs. On the other hand, the evidence of the plantings at John Ball about 1914 suggests that Goebel was not a "pure" adherent of

[20] *Grand Rapids Herald,* 17 September 1911:8.
[21] *Grand Rapids Press,* 28 March 1910:2.

the Prairie School, as he made allowance for some non-native plants while advocating wider use of native species. "An interesting feature will be borders of hardy flowers of the old fashioned gardens and native roadside and field flowers that can be grouped effectively." Also, Goebel's stated preference for the variety created by terrain indicates a certain lack of sympathy for pure prairie effects.[22]

Existing vegetation includes a mature native species forest of red and white oak, beech, and maple on the bluffs, with oak predominating. Red oaks exceeding twenty-five meters in height and fifty centimeters in diameter are common. The Goebel plantings on the flat land included oaks and maples, but also greater numbers of sycamores, willows, birches, and aspens, especially near the water features, as is characteristic of their native Midwestern habitat. These plantings flourish today in mature form.

A significant design feature of the landscape is the use of local glacial "erratics" excavated during the construction of the park. These glacially deposited granite boulders, from one to two meters in diameter, transported by the glaciers hundreds of miles from their place of origin and sculpted by the glaciers into rounded forms, constitute a kind of natural sculpture throughout the park.

The zoo constructions of the late 1940s and 1950s under the design superintendence of Zoo Director Fred Meyer continued to express naturalistic principles. Zoo enclosures were installed on the steep slopes of the middle ravine, which for this purpose was interpreted as a rocky glen. The picturesque pools of Goebel's predecessor, Wencel Cukierski, became the existing waterfowl and otter (now aviary) pools. Naturalism even retained a foothold in the surface parking area which replaced the small golf course which once occupied the western edge of the East Meadow until 1963. The curvilinear lines of the parking area echo the winding drive and the meandering tree line edge of the meadow, softening the intrusion and allowing it to nestle more unobtrusively within the original design. Similarly, the north parking lot (1951) was designed along organic lines and was originally set in an elm grove, subsequently lost through Dutch elm disease.[23]

V(E)(3) ***Park Buildings and Structures***

Pavilion (1908-09)
Architect Eugene Osgood, of the well-known Grand Rapids firm Osgood & Osgood, designed the park's largest and most prominent building – the Classic Revival style pavilion. Owen Ames Kimball constructed the building, which replaced the large conservatory and greenhouses that once occupied the site, but were

[22] *Grand Rapids Herald*, 17 September 1911:8.
[23] *Grand Rapids Press*, 14 May 1951:42.

demolished just prior to its construction. The reinforced concrete building with red brick veneer has wide overhanging eaves and is circled by a broad verandah. Although the original red Spanish tile roof has been replaced by shingles and the wood railing between the brick piers of the verandah has been replaced by a metal railing (1952), the appearance of the building has changed little since its construction. Sited on a rise to provide access to the basement level, it was designed to shelter up to 4,000 people in case of rain. The lower level contained public toilet facilities and an office for the park superintendent, while the main floor featured a soda fountain. Dances and a variety of other social activities also took place in the pavilion.

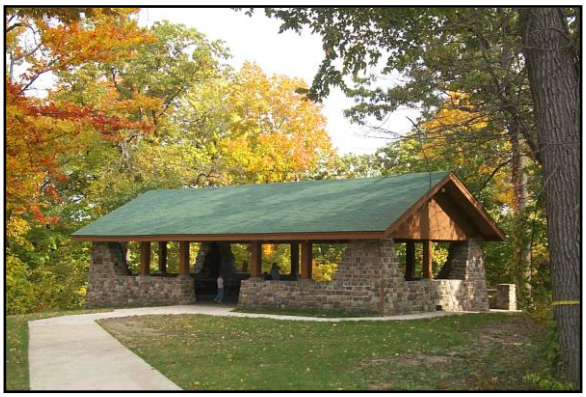
In 1964 the Community Circle Theatre began its performances on the main floor, where it has operated each summer since that time. The theatre will move to new quarters on the campus of Aquinas College in 2002. The lower level was converted for use as classrooms and zoo and Zoo Society administrative offices in 1986.

Band shell (1934/1963)
The band shell, constructed in 1934 with funds provided by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, occupies the general site where bandstands have stood since the 1890s. In a 1963 remodeling by the city parks department, the original classical detailing was removed and replaced by a more naturalistic redwood stained plywood on the exterior with bracing struts at each side, giving it the mid-century appearance it has today.

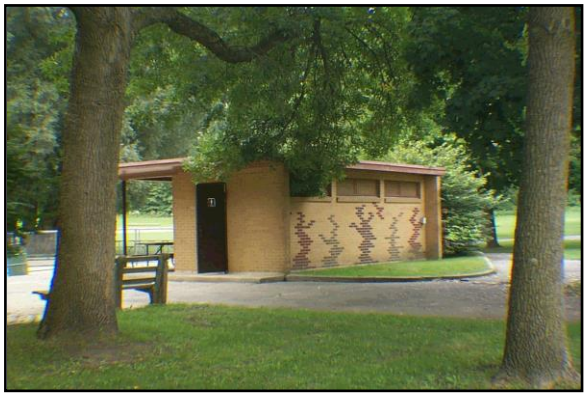
Brick Picnic Shelter (1949)
Constructed in 1949 by the Strom Construction Company, this one-story brick shelter adjacent to the skating pond was designed to provide a warming room for winter skaters. This permanent building replaced a temporary shelter erected each winter to accommodate skaters. Panels enclosing the building were designed to be removed in the summer for picnicking and summer play activity. There is a small kitchen area at the south end of the structure and public toilets at the north end. A terrace with a brick balustrade flanks a central stair leading down to the water.

Note the Middle Knob of the bluffs rising behind the shelter.

Stone Picnic Shelter (1951)



Originally referred to as an observation tower, this naturalistically designed stone and wood shelter was constructed as part of an extensive post-war improvement program of the hilltop picnic area that began in 1949 under the direction of park superintendent Frederick C. See. However, during the past fifty years the trees on the bluff have grown to partially block the spectacular view of the city that was once visible from this site. The shelter was rehabilitated in 1999 as part of a renovation of the hilltop picnic area funded by the John Ball Zoo Society and the Gayle Booth Zoo Family Fund.[24]



Comfort Station (1959)

This brick comfort station was constructed as part of the development of a new playground. In addition to restroom facilities, it housed caretaker storage, and offices for the recreation leader. The playground features a wading pool, a tether ball court, and a combination volleyball/basketball court.

Park Structures

After 1900, a more active recreational use of the park began. A merry-go-round was installed in 1904, a forerunner of the larger playground that was to come in 1910. Two ball fields were constructed in 1908 and a third in 1916, two of which survive today. In 1922, construction of the tennis courts added to the recreational facilities offered where they remain today, although in need of repair. A nine-hole golf course was laid out on the great lawn in 1923, but was removed in 1963 when the parking lot east of the pavilion was constructed.

Remnants of a dam and small artificial lake that were used for swimming prior to 1915 remain at the south end of the park. This pool, which replaced it, was closed during the Depression due to lack of funds for maintenance and was never reopened or replaced.

Other park furnishings, including benches, picnic tables, and playground equipment are contemporary replacements of furnishings that have been found in the park over its history.

[24] *The Advance*, 20 April 1999:1

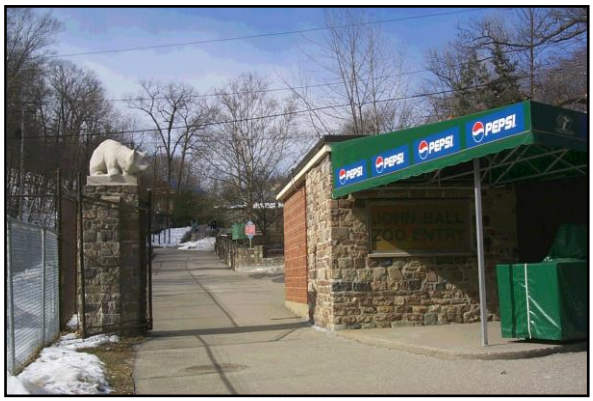
Frank Nawara Memorial Fountain (1967)
The fountain at the park entry, dedicated August 9, 1967, was funded by the West Fulton Merchants Association. Each June throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the association sponsored a week-long fund-raiser in the park called the John Ball O-Rama with all proceeds donated to the park. In addition to offering door prizes, rides and a midway, the association sponsored dances in the pavilion. All moneys raised at this annual event were donated to the city for use in John Ball Park.

Monkey Island (1949)
Monkey Island inaugurated the post-World War II revival of the zoo. It was the first step in a long-range plan to bring the animals out of cages and place them in natural settings surrounded by wide moats. Erected by Osterink Construction Company, the exhibit officially opened to the public June 1, 1950. As part of a large-scale renovation of the zoo in 1982, it was modified from its original design when winter quarters, connected to the island by a causeway, were completed.

Waterfowl and Water Animal Moats (1951)
The series of stepped ponds that form this exhibit occupy essentially the same space as a series of small picturesque ponds developed during the early years of John Ball Park. Red Ionia sandstone boulders helped to "simulate an outdoor rocky terrain" necessary for the otter, beaver, muskrat, and waterfowl which were housed here. The exhibit provided "something interesting and colorful to look at"[25] for persons walking from the newly constructed parking lot west of the swan pond to the zoo farther up the hill, according to city landscape architect William Pries. The stone wall bordering the exhibit is constructed of paving blocks salvaged from street reconstruction.

[25] *Grand Rapids Press,* 1 October 1951:14.

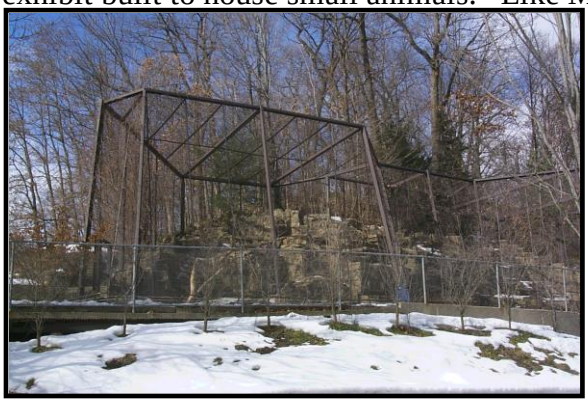
Zoo Entrance (1952)



A polar bear-topped stone column and a small stone structure that was originally used to post park and zoo events, flank the entrance to the zoo. In a *Grand Rapids Press* story about the construction of the new entrance, park superintendent Frederick C. See stated that the "[c]ost of the project is expected to be nominal because paving blocks torn up from city streets will be used." [26] The spring water that flowed to the "grotto" to the north was redirected to two drinking fountains and a faucet for filling containers that were located adjacent to the stone structure. See noted that between twenty-five and thirty people came to the park for spring water each day. Interviews with long-time West Side residents indicate that John Ball Park spring water was a key ingredient in home-brew during Prohibition.

Animal Cages and Stairway (1954)

Tons of sandstone slabs salvaged from curbing when Plainfield Avenue on the city's northeast side was widened and boulders gathered from around the park were used in this exhibit built to house small animals. Like Monkey Island, these cages were intended to provide a more natural animal habitat, as well as to give the public a better view.[27] Originally the wire cages once curved in a large arch from the rear of the exhibit. This area, called the "upper run," was modified in 1982 to create a puma exhibit.[28]



Stairway to "Upper Run" (c. 1954)

[26] *Grand Rapids Press*, 19 December 1952: 30.

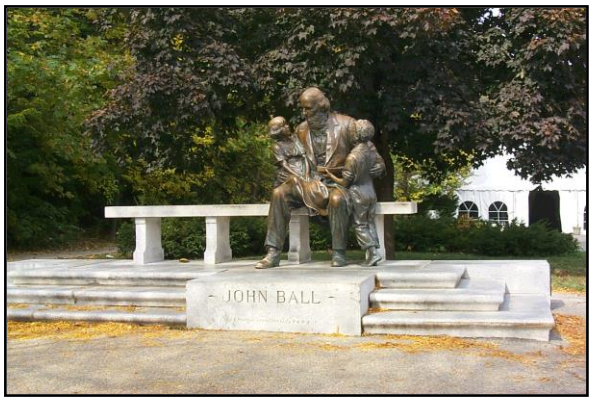
[27] *Grand Rapids Press*, 14 October 1953:27.

[28] *Downtown*, September 1982:24.

Memorials

John Ball Memorial *(1926)*

John Ball (1794-1884) is memorialized by a bronze figure of himself seated on a granite bench with two children. The figures of the children were modeled by Virginia and Albert Ellis Ball, great-grandchildren of this Grand Rapids pioneer. Created by the noted sculptor Pompeo Luigi Coppini (1870-1957) from a design by Gertrude Van Houten of Grand Rapids, the statue was dedicated in August 1925. It was moved slightly southwest to its present location in 1951, when the parking lot at the north side of the park near the skating and picnic shelter was constructed. Generations of children have posed for photographs beside Albert Ellis and Virginia on John Ball's lap. The statue is individually listed as a Grand Rapids Landmark.



Born in Florence in 1870, sculptor Pompeo Luigi Coppini studied at the Accademia di Belle Arte under Augusto Rivalta. He came to the United States in 1898. Much of his work is in Texas, where he moved in 1901 after receiving the commission for the Confederate monument (1901-03) that sits on the capitol grounds in Austin. Many other Texas commissions followed, one of the best known is the *Littlefield Fountain Memorial* (1920-28) at the University of Texas at Austin. Coppini moved to New York in 1919, where his studio was located when he received the Ball memorial commission. He later (1943 to 1945) headed the Fine Arts Department at Trinity University in San Antonio and founded the Coppini Academy of Fine Arts. Other Michigan commissions include *Richard B. Westnedge,* Kalamazoo (1900); *General William Rufus Shafter,* Galesburg (1919).

Moses V. Aldrich Memorial *(1925; moved 1971; 1982)*

Originally located at the corner of College Avenue and Cherry Street in a small city park on the site of the Aldrich homestead, this memorial to Moses V. Aldrich (1829-1879) was a gift from his daughter, Katherine Aldrich Blake, to the city in 1925. Anna Coleman Ladd of Boston crafted the sundial supported by a graceful bronze figure. Repeated vandalism forced the relocation of the memorial to this site in 1982. It is individually listed as a Grand Rapids Landmark.

Moses Aldrich came to Grand Rapids in 1855 at the age of

twenty-five to join his father-in-law William Ledyard in the manufacture of fanning mills. Ledyard and Aldrich opened one of the city's earliest banks in 1860. In 1874, Aldrich constructed the Aldrich Block, which still stands at the corner of Monroe Center and Ottawa Avenue, where he operated the Aldrich Bank until his untimely death in 1879. He served three terms as mayor of Grand Rapids in 1868, 1869 and 1870. From 1875 until his death, Aldrich served as County Superintendent of the Poor and often personally funded the feeding of the poor. In his book, *Yesterday's of Grand Rapids*, Charles Belknap said of Aldrich, "He had once been poor himself and knew how hard was the struggle."

Playground Sculpture

Three pieces of playground sculpture are located in the park, all of which lie outside the period of significance.

Recreform (1974) Mary Gardner Preminger. This sculpture, created for Festival '74, Grand Rapids' annual art celebration, was a gift from the artist. It consists of three metal triangular forms of varying heights pierced by circles and joined together by rods.

Orange-ganic Domino (1977) Robbin L. Crawford. This giant orange and yellow steel domino won the Playground Sculpture Competition for Festival '77.

Earth Loops (1978) Robert A. (Robin) Jensen. The winner of the Playground Sculpture Competition for Festival ''78 is composed of giant orange, yellow and blue fiberglass loops that snake in and out of the ground.

V(E)(4) ***John Ball*** – By Peter Carlberg

> "...Men seek to perpetuate their names by providing for the erection of monuments, but granite wears away and the names inscribed thereon are forgotten. If you would write your name on the scroll of people's benefactors; if you would be regarded as one who loved his fellow men; purchase a suitable tract of ground and give it to the city for park purposes...A pleasure ground would preserve your name forever. Remember that the rippling waters on the western hillside, the birds, the flowers, the sun glints and zephyrs, whisper the name of John Ball, and if you should emulate his example, the same forces of nature and hundreds of thousands of grateful people would whisper yours."
>
> Hon. At. S. White, 1904

This paean to John Ball, delivered before the Grand River Valley Horticultural Society just days shy of the twentieth anniversary of his death, rather typifies more than a century of glowing homage. The park that grew from Ball's original 40-acre bequest has become a lasting monument to his name. But it's very conspicuous beauty has tended to eclipse

and obscure the memory of the man himself, and his enormous role in pioneering and building West Michigan.

In local history books, from Albert Baxter's *History of the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan*, (1891) to Z. Z. Lydens' *The Story of Grand Rapids*, (1966), et al., John Ball (the man, not the park) earns a daunting count of page references in the indexes. Above portraits of Grand Rapids' pioneer triumvirate, Lydens writes, "The greatness of Grand Rapids may lie in the character of the people who founded it and the character of those who came after. The roll call might begin with the names of Louis Campau, the founder; Lucius Lyon, the developer; and John Ball, the promoter."

Lydens' labels are anachronistic business-club hyperbole. Campau's arrival in 1826 brought instant complaints to the authorities from missionaries to the Indians about the wily Frenchman's whiskey trading. To no avail. By the early 1830's, land speculation in the western territories was reaching fever pitch and Campau and Lyon were busy platting out streets and competing villages sites. The speculation bubble burst in 1837, collapsing many state and local banks and Campau's and Lyon's paper fortunes. Except for tangling the future downtown street layout, the "founder" and "developer" had little further impact on the future.

The "promoter", however, played a large role, over many decades, in facilitating the settlement of West Michigan and fostering the birth and growth of many business enterprises and civic institutions.

On December 27, 1871, eighty veterans of the pioneer days met at Sweet's Hotel in Grand Rapids to form the Old Settlers' Association. On the same night, they appointed Professor Franklin Everett to collect their stories and reminiscences and write a history of local settlement and development. Six years later, *Memorials of the Grand River Valley* was published, with John Ball's engraved portrait as the frontispiece facing the title page. His biography and prepared personal narrations of early history dominate the opening chapters and flesh out many of the later ones. And it is clear that, in the eyes of his fellow pioneers, he held a prominence of place unrivaled by any of his contemporaries.

In biographies of Ball, his many wild early adventures, wide personal interests and peripatetic later travels, rather tend to obscure his larger but more prosaic-sounding contributions to civilization. Besides getting shipwrecked off Georgia, exploring the West, sojourning with the Mountain Men, fighting Indians, visiting the Sandwich Islands, rounding the Horn on a whaler and hitching a ride home as Ship's Clerk for Lt. David Farragut (later Admiral and hero of the Battle of Mobile Bay), Ball also managed to work his way through Dartmouth College as a village schoolteacher, earn his law license, serve as the first school teacher in Oregon, and contribute numerous reports to the scientific journals of the day.

Along the way he met many famous figures - President Andrew Jackson, Aaron Burr, various explorers and many lesser luminaries. Both in these early encounters and later in life, he seems to have left an indelible impression of personal honesty and unshakable

integrity.

In 1834, Ball returned to New England, a forty year-old bachelor still searching for a settled career. But by 1836, many of his friends, relatives and business acquaintances had caught the national mania for speculation in unsettled government lands, and were not content to let their veteran explorer friend rusticate at his law practice in Troy, New York. That August found him newly-landed in the settlement of Detroit, personally penniless but lugging around a considerable fortune in funds from feverish eastern backers.

Finding land prices in that area already inflated sky-high, Ball declined to invest and headed west on horseback, exploring widely. Reaching the muddy hamlet of Grand Rapids in October, he found Campau, Lyon and other speculators offering 50-foot "city" lots for $2,500. The story-and-a-half Eagle House was the largest building, and keeping the local and visiting land gamblers dry, fed and whiskeyed appeared to be the only active commerce.

Unimpressed with the metropolis, Ball scouted the countryside. Settlers were few and struggling, but Ball found large tracts of timber, fertile land and other potential resources. He purchased a few remote parcels at reasonable price from disappointed speculators eager to try elsewhere, but mostly he explored and held out for better opportunities.

It was a wise choice, "For about the first of June [1837] I was in Detroit, and Oh! What a collapse, and instead of high hopes it was all despair. The bubble had burst. The New York banks and those of other states had failed or suspended specie payment...and all speculation was up and over...Instead of the walls of the hotels and public places being covered with village plats and lands for sale, as the month before, they were all bare, and sadness was on all the faces."

The bank failures wiped out most of Ball's investment funds, but he hoofed it west again, booked semi-permanent lodging at the Eagle House, and continued surveying the land and meeting its sparse inhabitants. He must have impressed them - that fall they nominated him for State Representative. The district covered Muskegon, Ottawa, Kent, Ionia and Clinton counties, and Ball got more than four-hundred of the five-hundred or so votes cast.

After the session, Ball visited his Eastern friends, collected his law books and returned to Grand Rapids to hang out his shingle. Cash money was scarce and established settlers so desperate for titles to their land that William Richmond charged them 100% interest on a two-year mortgage. In contrast, John Ball, taking modest fees and a longer view, earned the sobriquet "Honest John Ball".

In 1842, Governor John S. Barry, who had known Ball in the legislature and was impressed by his integrity, broad knowledge and experience as an explorer, appointed him to select 500,000 acres of government land in West Michigan to be sold to finance internal improvements. When these were offered for sale, new settlers began to trickle

in, and John Ball found his career as a community-builder.

Prospective settlers, immigrant leaders and hopeful entrepreneurs sought him out as the most honest and knowledgeable local land expert. For Professor Everett, he described his early role:

"After a time, emigrants bound for the West, came to look, saying to me (for they all came to me for information), 'We don't expect to like Michigan lands, but as they are selected lands, and can be got so cheaply, we thought we would come and see.' But, to their surprise, they were well suited, and all purchased. On their report, a dozen would follow, so that in a few years the great majority of those lands were settled. I not only furnished them with plats, and directed them to the lands, but purchased warrants, sent them to the office, and made the purchases. If the funds were a little short, I gave them time to make up the deficiency, and if much was lacking, I would take the land in my own name, as security, giving them a receipt for what they paid. I managed to keep every man who came, in some way; and never had occasion to complain that they did not, on their part, fulfill their engagements... When, a few years afterwards, the Hollanders came in, and took the balance of those lands down near their settlement, and they and the other settlers came to Grand Rapids for their supplies, business revived, and we moved on again... It does me good to go over those then-forest lands, along well-made roads, lined with fine white houses, rich orchards, and fruitful fields. Nine out of ten of those have succeeded - showing that cheap lands and industry are the surest road to competence, especially for young men and those of limited means. I do not at once recognize them all, but they do me, and refer, with seeming gratitude, to their first coming to the country, and my aiding them in getting their farms. This, to me, is better pay than the little fees they gave me for those services."

To which Professor Everett appended, "Uncle John, you are right. You have as many friends as the minister, and many a heart says 'God bless you.'"

The pioneer days were just the beginning. Ball fostered and invested in a daunting number of fledgling business enterprises and civic institutions over the ensuing decades, from gypsum mines to salt-wells and stucco, and the Grand Rapids Lyceum of Natural History (now the Grand Rapids Public Museum). He helped organize the city school district, launched a fund drive for the first school building with $100 of his own money, and served on the school board for twenty-one years.

Ball continued his community-building efforts by inviting new immigrant groups from Europe to settle in West Michigan, giving them sage advice and helping them get established. The Scandinavians still honor him in their local history. A large contingent of his early New England friends and neighbors also followed him here. And at age 55, finally feeling financially "settled", he married and had ten children, the start of a still-growing clan.

The park that developed from the forty acres he gave the city touches many of the main themes of John Ball's life, just as he probably intended. The diverse topography of wild

wooded hills, ravines, springs and ponds recalls his intense fascination with natural history and exploration. Major cities of the time had substantial parks, but Grand Rapids had no large parks at all. Founding new cultural and civic assets was another main theme in Ball's life.

In other ways, the park has continued to carry on the work of its founder.

In his autobiography, Ball wrote of the year of his birth: "This same year, 1794, Poland was severed, having been defended to the last with pike and scythe by the brave Kosciuszko of our Revolution and his followers." Not long after his death in 1884, new Polish refugees from the Austrian occupation zone began settling in Grand Rapids. Being unskilled latecomers, they mostly found work in the gypsum mines and clustered in compact workmen's houses in the Gunnison and Park Street area. In 1903, they founded a new parish and purchased the most beautiful site they could find - on Valley Street, directly across from John Ball Park - for their new Sacred Heart Church.

Among the founding parishioners was City Parks Superintendent Wencel Cukierski, who had designed and overseen the development of the park almost from its inception. The previous year he had built a house and greenhouses on the north corners of Valley and Fulton, the beginnings of his later independent career and some of the earliest structures in the park neighborhood. The official history of the parish, *The Sacred Heart Story* (1981), repeatedly mentions the park's role in promoting community development:

> "It was this immediate, beautiful John Ball Park area, eventually to become a choice residential section, which Father Krakowski and his men had wisely chosen in September 1903 as the location of their new Parish of the Sacred Heart. What vision on their part! Many of the old pioneer Polish families, as they improved their economic condition, left the older Wojciechwo area (St. Adalbert parish) and built new homes in this section of the city."

The following year, the Sacred Heart Mutual Aid Society voted to name their new settlement area south of Fulton, "Krakowo", after Cracow, Poland. But colloquially, it was often called "Sercowo" (The Heart's Area), or simply "The South Side." Within two decades, new houses covered almost all the available land around the park for blocks in depth. The areas north of Fulton Street filled just as rapidly, with eager home-builders of all nationalities equally drawn to the beauty of the park, now just minutes away from downtown on the new streetcar line. The immigrants reveled in the park and filled it with their traditional outdoor activities, rituals and celebrations. They also played baseball there avidly and eventually became thoroughly Americanized. These days the parish roster is a melting-pot of nationalities.

Despite the ups and downs of a century, the neighborhood continues to renew itself with succeeding generations of young families - newcomers and descendants of pioneers still drawn to its beautiful park, cozy streets, houses and convenient shops. It is probably exactly what John Ball intended.

V(E)(5) ***Park Land Acquisition***

The forty acres bequeathed to Grand Rapids for a public park in the 1869 will of John Ball form the nucleus of the current park. Located on the eastern slope of the hill at the end of West Fulton Street, the "Ball Forty" was thickly wooded with groves of oak, maple, and elm trees and provided a fine view of the city. When Ball died in 1884, opposition to the acceptance of his gift arose because the property then laid outside the city limits and was considered inaccessible. From Straight Street to the foot of the bluffs lay the great Gunnison swamp – a lake in spring and an insect-infested marsh in summer. However, there was strong popular support for a large park on the West Side and pro-park aldermen noted that this was the first public bequest in the city's history.

In April 1884, the Common Council voted to pay $750 to Mary Ball for her dower interest in exchange for a release of title to the property. The Council further voted to grade West Fulton Street to the city limits to provide public access. Walker Township, where the park was located at that time, agreed to grade the street from the park to the city limits.

In his inaugural address the following year, Mayor John L. Curtiss, noting the need for more public park land, urged that a fund for the purchase of such land be included in the city's annual budget. Each mayor succeeding Curtiss into the twentieth century reiterated his message. Since the city was growing steadily in population and in physical size, its leaders and its citizens believed it was imperative that John Ball Park continue to grow as well. With broad public support, the city began to expand the park as the central feature of its park system. In his report to the Common Council in 1903, Parks Committee Chairman Joseph Renihan expressed the popular feeling when he referred to John Ball "as noted and beloved as the furniture of the Furniture City. This is the people's park . . ."[29]

In 1885, in an open letter printed in the *Evening Leader*, Thomas D. Gilbert[30] proposed that the park be named John Ball Park to perpetuate the memory of its donor, beginning a public debate over the name of the new park that would last until Common Council voted unanimously on August 4, 1890 "that as a proper recognition of the honorable, useful and public spirited life of Mr. Ball, and in recognition of his generous gift of the very valuable and beautiful piece of land, the said proposed public park, be named and known as the John Ball Park."[31] In September the park was provided with a budget of $3,000. From this point forward, appropriations for the maintenance and improvement of the park were to steadily increase for the next twenty years.

The first addition to the park came in the summer of 1891 when the Common Council purchased 17.3 acres from Henry DeForest that extended the park south to Butterworth Street. The following November an *Evening Leader* editorial, noting that thousands had visited John Ball Park during the past summer, strongly urged that the city continue to

[29] *Common Council*, 2 May 1903:890.

[30] *The Evening Leader*, 2 August 1890. Thomas Gibson was a close friend of John Ball. While a member of the Common Council in 1884, Gibson fought successfully for the acceptance of the gift of the park and later for the establishment of an improvement fund.

[31] *The Evening Leader*, 5 August 1890:4.

purchase land surrounding the park while it remained available and reasonably priced. Three possible purchases were specifically mentioned: an eighty-acre parcel west of the park, a forty-acre parcel north of the park, and the forty acres of flatland to the east. Ball Park will be the city's chief park for all time to come and as land can be purchased cheaper now than ten years hence the money would be well expended and future generations would applaud."[32] The *Leader* editorial voiced the broad public support that existed for the growth and improvement of the park.

In 1895, the area known as the "north forty" (due to its location north of the Ball Forty) was purchased from Joseph Kerwin, increasing the total park area to more than ninety-seven acres. This section remained unimproved until 1907 when Glenwood Drive, a winding scenic road that provided public access to the area, was completed. A purchase of nine and one-half acres from Agnes Fitzpatrick in 1897 extended the park east along Butterworth Street.

The next two property acquisitions expanding John Ball Park were interestingly tangled deals. In 1904, Julia Richards was offered $10,000 for approximately twenty-two acres lying north of Fulton Street, west of Richards Avenue and east of the north forty, but the persistent opposition of Alderman George Thompson prevented the purchase. During the following two years, Julia Richards platted the property as the John Ball Park Plat in partnership with Peter W. Decker and Fred R. Jean[33]. In May of 1906 Decker, Jean and Richards offered to deed to the city seven acres east of the north forty in exchange for certain improvements to the Richards Addition adjacent to the park. What the exact improvements were supposed to be is unclear from the Common Council minutes, but appear to have had something to do with a new sewer being constructed down Shawmut Boulevard. In June the Council voted to accept the gift on the recommendation of the Parks and Cemetery Commission.

The following May 1907, a letter from Decker & Jean protesting that the city had not upheld its end of the bargain appears in the Common Council minutes. A report of the Park and Cemetery Commission in July placed responsibility with the engineering department. Decker & Jean rescinded its offer in November 1908 and demanded that the land be reconveyed. The resolution of the complaint is unclear, but the city retained the property and John Ball Park grew by seven acres.

The Parks Committee began negotiations in 1903 with Mary McNamara to acquire nearly thirty acres of flat land east of the park bounded on the north by West Fulton Street, on the east by Valley Avenue, on the south by Park Avenue and on the west by the park. This area, already being used by picnickers and as a site for the circus when it came into town, would provide the flat land necessary for increased recreational use and open space for the thousands who visited the park annually. In July of 1903, the committee recommended the city accept a negotiated price of $40,000 for the parcel. Mrs. McNamara changed her mind in September, and then gave the city an option on the

[32] *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, 5 August 1890:1.

[33] Peter W. Decker and Fred R. Jean were partners in the real estate firm of Decker & Jean (1895-1946), which platted and developed the Richards Addition, as well as the John Ball Park and Lincoln Park subdivisions, among many others in the city.

property in December. The Common Council decided to put the question of bonding for the purchase of the property to a public vote in April 1904, but withdrew the proposal from the ballot on March 28. The reason for the withdrawal is unclear, but is likely to have been due to the death of Mrs. McNamara.

There is no further official mention of the McNamara property until July 1906. Common Council minutes then note the receipt of a letter from the estate of Mary McNamara demanding a yearly rental of $25.00 for the use of the property from 1894 and further demanding "a discontinuance of the present and future trespass upon their property by the John Ball Park management."[34] This would indicate an informal extension of park use onto the McNamara property from its earliest days. In April 1907, a petition signed by 117 of the city's leading businessmen, including furniture manufacturers E. A. Stowe, E. W. Irwin and Charles R. Sligh, clothier Meyer S. May, financier John W. Blodgett, and Thomas M. and John Peck of the Peck Brothers Drug Company, was submitted to the Council stating:

> "We, the undersigned, property owners of Grand Rapids being interested in the welfare of our city and the beautifying of the same, believe that it will be to the city's and our best interest for the city to purchase for an addition to the park, a sufficient amount of the level ground east of John Ball Park.
>
> We recommend and request that the Council take immediate proceedings to this end."[35]

Throughout 1907, the Park Committee conducted negotiations for twenty-eight acres of McNamara property with the Michigan Trust Company, executor of the McNamara estate. In February 1908, the committee strongly advised the Common Council to purchase the property for a negotiated price of $30,000, stating "[t]he park is incomplete and unbalanced without it."[36] When the Common Council met to vote on closing the land purchase, Bridget McNamara, daughter of the deceased Mary McNamara, caused "a bit of real excitement" according to the *Grand Rapids Press* account of the meeting. Described as "a prominent figure in the long-drawn-out property controversy that arose after the death of the aged Mary McNamara," Bridget roundly criticized the Council as well as individual aldermen and the Michigan Trust Company, being "so worked up at what she termed the injustice of the deal that it was difficult to understand all that she said."[37] Following her remarks the vote was taken, with every alderman voting for the purchase. In February 1909, the city was named in a suit filed against the estate by James McNamara, brother of Bridget, in an effort to prevent the land sale. This suit was later dismissed.

In its year-end report to the Common Council in 1909, the Board of Park and Cemetery Commissioners noted the purchase of the McNamara property as the high point of the year. However, "the disposition to spend lavishly on John Ball Park and the readiness to

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[34] *Common Council*, 30 July 1906:274.
[35] *Common Council*, 8 April 1907:926.
[36] *Common Council*, 3 February 1908:764.
[37] *Grand Rapids Press*, 11 February 1908:3.

curtail unmercifully everywhere else"[38] was also mentioned. It was recommended that more money should be spent acquiring land for parks and playgrounds around the city and less on expanding John Ball Park.

Despite the opinion of the Park and Cemetery Commission, there continued to be strong public sentiment in support of enlarging John Ball Park. In a petition presented to the Common Council in 1910 signed by "scores of prominent and wealthy citizens" it was "noted with regret that the beauty of John Ball Park is very much marred and the value of the city's chief park injured by the building of residences along the border of the north forty."[39] The focus of concern was the John Ball Park plat, which the city had failed to purchase from Julia Richards in 1904. During the summer and fall of 1910, a campaign to pass a $200,000 bond issue for the purchase of land for parks and playground was underway. In anticipation of the passage of the bond issue, supporters of John Ball Park expansion urged the city to commit to the purchase of the John Ball Park plat. Both the *Grand Rapids Press* and the *Grand Rapids Herald* supported the petitioners. A *Press* editorial entitled "The Grand Rapids of Tomorrow" warned that the city's promising future should not "be mortgaged through a present parsimony, which in the end is most uneconomical."[40] Despite this support, there were no further large land purchases. The Parks Committee chose instead to acquire park land in other areas of the city. Additional small purchases of property between 1909 and 1930 brought the total acreage of John Ball Park to 142.2 where it remained until the construction of I-196 through the north forty, which was completed in 1964.

V(E)(6) ***Park Development***

When John Ball wrote his will in 1869, it became common knowledge that he intended to leave forty acres to the city for park purposes. A number of sources indicate the Ball Forty began to be used as an informal picnic ground long before it officially became a city park. By 1885, a streetcar line ran down Fulton Street, not only increasing public access to the popular resort, but also encouraging residential development in the area around the park. This line extended to the park by 1892. Beyond constructing an improved road to the land, the city did not initiate development of the park until May of 1890. At that time the Common Council instructed the Board of Public Works to "engage some suitable person as soon as possible to construct plans for the improvement of the city park, familiarly known as the Ball Forty, and to submit the same to this council for approval . . ."[41]

In 1891, the Board of Public Works hired landscape gardener Herman Haerlin of Cincinnati, who developed a plan for the Ball Forty that appears to have been partially carried out. Curving graveled driveways and paths were laid out, rustic bridges, rails and banisters were constructed, and a stream in the main ravine was dammed to create an artificial lake. The drive up the main ravine still exists. It was widened to forty-five feet

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[38] *Common Council*, 29 April 1909:919.
[39] *Grand Rapids Press*, 9 June 1910:36.
[40] *Grand Rapids Press*, 1 November 1910:8.
[41] *Common Council*, 26 May 1890:65.

and rebuilt with macadam in 1899. Although resurfaced over the years and now closed to the public, it remains in partial use today as a service road in the zoo area.

The early growth and development of John Ball Park was directed by Wencel L. Cukierski[42] (1869-1926), who became Superintendent of Parks in May 1898. Cukierski began working for the Parks Department in 1892 as a seasonal employee until he was given charge of the greenhouses and landscaping at John Ball Park. Under Cukierski's direction, the greenhouses steadily grew in size and production, providing flowers and plants to other city parks, as well as to John Ball Park. His work at the park brought him to the attention of the Parks Commission and led to his appointment as superintendent.

Born in Prussian-controlled Posen, Poland, Cukierski began working with his father, a landscape gardener in charge of a 40,000-acre estate, at the age of fifteen. After demonstrating skill and ability in his father's vocation, he was sent to Erfurt College in 1887, a large and well-known agricultural college in Germany. After graduating from a two-year course, Cukierski worked as an assistant to a leading Berlin landscape gardener in the public parks of that city. In the summer of 1889, he immigrated to Grand Rapids with his brother John. While working for Henry Smith, a leading florist in the city, he attended business school.

An *Evening Press* article describes the park in the spring of 1898: "the lawns are in beautiful shape, the lakes are clear and the trees are acquiring their spring garb . . . the fountains are running." A conservatory had been constructed near the greenhouse, which this year produced 150,000 plants, most of which were to be used in the floral displays of John Ball Park "because they can be employed to better advantage there." [43]

In addition to numerous large flower beds, *John Ball Park* was spelled out in flowers at the foot of the hillside and a floral sundial, seven feet in diameter, was located nearby. This sundial was noted to be "very similar to the large clock in Lincoln Park, Chicago."[44] Another bed featured the crossed flags of America and Cuba surmounted by an American eagle. A large floral arch in front of the conservatory was a regular feature of Curkierski's spectacular displays in the park.

Curkierski's plan for the park was based upon the principles of nineteenth century landscape design. Park use was largely passive, providing Grand Rapids' citizens a respite from the noisy, dirty, busy city. Like similar showcase parks in other American cities, it was a place where the beauties of nature could be peacefully contemplated while strolling, bicycling, or driving in carriages (and later in automobiles) along its winding woodland drives. Small artificial lakes and large stylized flower beds and floral displays added to the natural beauty. Bridges constructed of rustic work spanned its forest glens over cascading pools of water. The small lakes and cascading pools not only added to the picturesque nature of the park, but were also a solution to the problem of ground water

[42] Cukierski is sometimes spelled Cukerski or Kukierski.
[43] *The Evening Press*, 21 May 1898:3.
[44] *The Evening Press*, 18 June 1898:4.

run-off and controlled the many small creeks formed in the ravines by the natural springs of the bluffs.

Because of the lack of flat land in the early park, Cukierki graded and terraced the main front bluff creating successive tiers, raised one above the other behind the grandstand to better accommodate visitors. Benches were placed on these tiers, where park patrons could listen to the weekly band concerts while contemplating the view of the city. The effect of these tiers is mentioned in an *Evening Press* story of the Park Day festivities that were held in John Ball Park for many years to celebrate the official opening of the city parks. Factories and stores were closed for half the day to allow everyone to attend. According to the article "the great hill to the west of the greenhouses which rises like a natural amphitheater was covered with people."[45] The lower part of the hill was regraded in 1910 as part Eugene Goebel's redevelopment of the McNamara addition, but at least one of the tiers still exists as a path through the forested bluff.

John Ball Park was the jewel in Cukierski's crown as Superintendent of Parks – but also an eventual source of political dissatisfaction. He laid out paths, garden beds, floral plantings, and designed ornamental bridges, trellises and arbors. (As noted above, evidence of Cukierski's changes to the landscape remain visible in the original portions of the park.) Under his guidance it was a fine example of the romantic-era of park design – providing a beautiful place for citizens to stroll and contemplate nature.

Cukierski joined in founding Sacred Heart Church in 1903, which chose to locate on five choice lots of the McNamara Addition across the street from John Ball Park. The first parish building, which housed church, school, parish hall, and the convent of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, was completed in the fall of 1904. Polish families had settled in the area in the late nineteenth century to be close to the gypsum mines south and west of the park where the men were employed. The six-mile round-trip walk to St. Adelbert Church and school, the only Polish church on the West Side, was a hardship for those who lived near the park. With the establishment of Sacred Heart parish near the park, the area became a choice residential neighborhood. As their economic condition improved, more Polish families left the old neighborhood around St. Adelbert to build new homes in this section of the city. In 1904, the Sacred Heart Society voted to name the area *Krakowo* (Little Cracow). The stately Romanesque towers of Sacred Heart Church (1923) form an integral part of the historic vista of Grand Rapids as viewed from the bluffs of John Ball Park.

Through his success at John Ball Park, Cukierski's work gained statewide recognition. In 1908, he designed a city park in Cadillac, as well as the grounds of several prominent Cadillac residents. The Common Council did not want its park superintendent receiving money from outside sources and there also were complaints about the large portion of the budget dedicated to John Ball Park to the detriment of the city's other parks. J. J. Detmers and other local florists wrote to the Common Counsel requesting "that the

[45] *The Evening Press*, 27 June 1903:1.

Superintendent of Parks and Cemeteries ". . . be restrained from accepting the designing and planting of grounds for private citizens."[46]

In his year-end report to the Board of Park and Cemetery Commissioners in April 1909, chairman Charles B. Blair noted "there has of late shown itself on the one hand a disposition to spend lavishly on John Ball Park and on the other a readiness to curtail unmercifully everywhere else . . . If persevered in, this will arouse hostility in various quarters of the city which are more in need of expenditure for acquiring park and playground than John Ball Park is of further extension."

The criticism of the disparity of expenditure was not unfounded. For example, in 1900 out of a total park budget of $38,180, $25,000 was to be spent on John Ball Park, plus $3,500 for greenhouse operations. By 1908, John Ball expenditures totaled $51,256.60, including the $29,300 purchase price of the McNamara addition. In the report referred to above, Blair stated that "the conservatory and greenhouses will be demolished to make way for a pavilion that would be constructed on the site – these features had been maintained for many years at large expense and correspondingly small benefit." He further noted it was "[a]n important step . . . taken toward the adoption of a more rational treatment of park decoration than the bedding-plant method, which has so largely been abandoned elsewhere."[47] The romantic school of park design was on the wane and, up-to-date as always, Grand Rapids was looking for change.

After resigning his position in late 1908, Cukierski continued his private landscape business as the Grand Rapids Floral Company (now Ball Park Floral) at the northeast corner of West Fulton Street and Valley Avenue. His residence still stands across the street on Valley Avenue. Cukierski worked as a free-lance landscape designer until his death in 1926. Among his designs were the Polish Cemetery (1909), known as Holy Cross Cemetery since 1947, and Mount Calvary Cemetery in Grand Rapids, the Ludington, Holland, Muskegon and Cadillac State Parks, the grounds of Hackley Hospital in Muskegon, and grounds for numerous northern Michigan resorts, as well as for private owners.

In November 1908, the Board of Parks and Cemetery Commissioners recommended the appointment of Eugene V. Goebel, Superintendent of Oakhill Cemetery, to succeed Curkierski. Although the former park superintendent was not specifically mentioned, the board directed its Committee on Rules to draft changes requiring that the new superintendent file a monthly report on expenditures, on work done, and on work contemplated. The park superintendent would no longer be allowed to even purchase supplies without the prior consent of the board.

Eugene V. Goebel (1872-1946) came to Grand Rapids as a boy of eight years when his parents emigrated from Germany where his father had served as gardener on the estate of Count Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Imperial Germany. Goebel began working for

[46] *Common Council*, 20 April 1908: 930.
[47] *Common Council*, 29 April 1909:919.

the city of Grand Rapids at the age of nineteen, and three years later was named Superintendent of Oakhill Cemetery.

One of Goebel's first duties as Superintendent of Parks and Cemeteries was to oversee the construction of the pavilion in John Ball Park. The need for a pavilion had been under discussion for more than ten years. Local architect Christian Vierheilig had been commissioned to develop building plans in 1903 after the Common Council appropriated $9,000 for the purpose. Bids were let, but the subcommittee in charge of the project recommended that construction be delayed until after the question of the purchase of the McNamara land had been settled. Their decision may also have been influenced by the bids – the low bid, submitted by Hoertz & Son, was $13,000, considerably higher than the budgeted amount. Although Vierheilig was eventually paid for his work (after reducing his bill from $425.25 to $315), his design was never realized. The pavilion, designed by Eugene Osgood, was completed in November 1909 at a cost of $20,000.

With the addition of the McNamara property to the park in June 1908, Goebel now had a large expanse of flat land to work into the overall design. He transformed the park from the highly stylized and relatively passive design of Cukierski to a more naturalistic country park design in the tradition of Frederick Law Olmsted, incorporating features for active recreation.

In the spring of 1910, major work on the McNamara property began and the city watched the transformation with anticipation. A *Grand Rapids Press* story in March noted:

> "They are changing the landscape, wiping up streamlets, tearing out islands, plowing the hillsides, making lagoons and building driveways until 'It don't look like the same old place . . . ' The queer designs wrought in flowers and foliage [disporting] floral flags, clocks and things such as the wildwood never knew is all plowed up."[48]

The *Grand Rapids Herald* featured a map of Goebels proposed design, as well as an extended description of the project. In support of the money expended to achieve the great change in the park, the writer stated the park was now worth over $1 million, but its true value to the city far exceeded this worth. He further noted "[W]ere anything to happen that Grand Rapids should lose John Ball Park, it never could be replaced in Kent County."[49]

The spring of 1914 saw between 8,000 and 10,000 trees and shrubs planted in the park as the final phase of the redesign. In place of the large formal flower beds and elaborate floral designs favored by Cukierski, Goebel used native roadside and field flowers to provide color.

Under Goebel, park design began to accommodate the automobile. In 1912, "automobilists" were complaining of the narrowness of the scenic drive in the north forty

[48] *Grand Rapids Press*, 28 March 1910:2.
[49] *Grand Rapids Herald*, 8 May 1910:3.

and the danger it presented to drivers. The old scenic drive of the north forty gave way when Lake Michigan Drive was constructed through the park, accessed by winding drives from both Shawmut Boulevard (renamed Lake Michigan Drive) and Fulton Street. The city donated the right of way through the park, beginning the separation of the northwest corner of the park that was completed by the construction of I-196. At its dedication in November 1928, the new road was referred to as the "Golden Gateway to the Playgrounds of Michigan."[50] John J. Smolenski, chairman for the dedication ceremonies, suggested Lake Michigan Drive as the new name for the highway from the Pearl Street Bridge to Lake Michigan.

The design of John Ball Park today is largely that completed by Eugene Goebel. His original plans initially included a large lake to the east of the pavilion, but due to lack of funds only the ponds which exist today were constructed. The equipment is modern, but the location of the playground south of the pavilion was part of the 1910 design. With the exception of a number of elms lost to Dutch elm disease, hundreds of trees planted under Goebel's direction grace the park today.

Grand Rapids was an early participant in the national Playground Association, formed at a meeting hosted by President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House in 1906. The city's earliest playgrounds were located at John Ball Park and at "The Playgrounds", donated to the city by Charles Garfield and Julia Fletcher in 1906 and now known as Garfield Park.

In 1908, the Grand Rapids Board of Trade sponsored the "Grand Rapids Civic Revival" featuring self-described civic revivalist Charles Zueblin. Zueblin spoke twice a day for seven days to interested citizens on such topics as the making of the city, transportation, parks and recreation, and the administration of a city. Among the numerous committees formed was the More Beautiful City Committee dedicated to the esthetic improvement of Grand Rapids. From this committee grew the Playground Association of Grand Rapids, organized early in 1910 with Charles Garfield as its president. With the motto "A playground for every child, within one-half mile of its home," the association successfully campaigned for passage of a $200,000 bond issue that same year to fund the purchase of land for playgrounds. The following year the association successfully lobbied for city funding of supervised programs at the playgrounds.

Under the direction of Charles Garfield, Grand Rapids became a leader in the national playground movement, which encouraged playground development and supervised play as a weapon in the fight against juvenile delinquency and as a means to improve the physical and mental health of children.

In 1912, Charles H. Mills came to Grand Rapids from Hull House in Chicago to develop and to oversee the playground programs. Under Mills' direction each city park and playground, including John Ball Park, offered children supervised activities from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. six days a week during the summer months. Park acreage throughout the city increased from 140 acres in 1907 to nearly 1,300 acres in 1929. Between 1912

[50] *The Grand Rapids Spectator*, 17 November 1928:2.

and the depression years of 1933-34, Grand Rapids developed one of the finest recreation programs in the country. Each year all program participants gathered at John Ball Park in August for a field day to end the summer season. The swimming pool once located at the south end of John Ball Park was constructed during this period (1915) and closed in 1934 when it could no longer be maintained.

An interesting historical footnote illustrates the strong influence of the Dutch Calvinists and other religious conservatives in Grand Rapids during the early half of the twentieth century. A city ordinance required that the playgrounds be closed on Sundays. In 1915, the *Grand Rapids Press* reported that Rev. J. A. Schmitt, rector of St. Mary's Catholic Church, and Playground Association President Charles Garfield met with the city's Morals Efficiency Commission to request that city playgrounds be allowed to open on Sunday afternoons for the families of workingmen. Father Schmitt argued that harmless physical recreation was a benefit. Mr. Garfield called attention to the changing views of Sunday observance. Although there were no organized activities, the playgrounds were allowed to open on Sundays.

A strong advocate of the City Beautiful movement, Eugene Goebel worked closely with Charles W. Garfield, George W. Ames, and Charles N. Remington to develop the city's park and boulevard system and its playgrounds, and to establish the foundations of city planning in Grand Rapids. It was largely through Goebel's efforts that planning consultant Harlan Bartholomew of St. Louis, Missouri, was hired in the mid-1920s. The result was the Bartholomew Plan, one of the city's earliest planning efforts, clearly influenced by the ideas of Chicago architect and planner, Daniel Burnham. In acknowledgment of his skill and experience, Mayor George W. Welsh appointed Goebel to the first Grand Rapids Planning Commission in 1943.

Goebel resigned his position with the city to establish a private landscape design business in 1928. He planned the grounds of the Sunshine Sanitarium (now Kent Community Hospital), the Blythefield Country Club, and the Michigan College of Mining and Technology at Houghton, Michigan, as well as the grounds for private owners in the city and elsewhere.

During the early years of the Depression, the Board of Education assumed operation of the playground program because Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) funds were available only to educational agencies. This federal aid allowed the board to run the recreation programs and to maintain the parks and playgrounds. Playground directors were recruited from Works Progress Administration rolls. In 1934, the John Ball Park band shell was constructed with FERA funding, which also paid the salaries of the musicians that made up a concert band and a symphony orchestra. On Thursday evenings free concerts were offered in the park by the orchestra and on Sunday afternoons by the band.

Eugene Goebel's work in John Ball Park remains largely intact because money previously spent on the park was diverted to the acquisition of more park land throughout the city during the 1910s and 1920s. The little money available during the 1930s was

spent on maintenance and minimal programming, and during the 1940s the focus was on winning World War II and not on park development.

In 1948, more than five hundred West Side residents signed petitions asking that John Ball Park be restored to its former glory. Specifically cited was the disappearance of the swimming pool, the removal of the play equipment, the absence of nets at the tennis courts, and the need for a play director. The *Grand Rapids Press* headlined the story about the presentation of the petitions to the City Commission as "John Ball Park Petitioners Get Pleasant Words – No Money." Phil Koltak, leader of the petition drive stated, "We haven't objected before to the steady decline of the park the last sixteen years – loss of its zoo, swimming pool and band concerts – but the discontinuance of an adequate play center for our children has brought the matter to a head."[51]

Frederick C. See came to Grand Rapids to assume the position of Parks Superintendent in 1948. Under his direction, planning began for a massive improvement program for the city's parks, including John Ball. See was born in Frankfort, Germany, where his father owned flower shops. He studied landscape architecture in Berlin and Munich before coming to the United States in 1929 to work for an American landscaping firm. Because of the political turmoil in Germany, See chose to remain in this country where he worked for New York landscape architects Wadley & Smythe and later for Andrews & Clark, consulting engineers, while continuing his education at Newark College of Engineering. Following service in the Navy during World War II, he came to Grand Rapids to serve as Parks Superintendent, a position he held until 1972. In addition to his work with the city's parks, See designed the landscaping for the urban renewal-era City-County complex.

Once See was hired, the city did begin to spend money on John Ball Park. In 1949, a new building for winter skating, picnic and summer play activity was constructed on the shore of the north pond. Within the next three years, playground equipment was reinstalled, the hilltop picnic area was improved, and the zoo was reopened. The first parking lot was constructed in the park in 1951 near the skating/picnic shelter. In 1963, the golf meadow gave way to a second parking lot east of the pavilion.

The improvement at John Ball, as well as the other city parks, was fairly rapid under See's direction. By 1951, when the American Society of Landscape Architects met in Grand Rapids, it complimented the city on developing modern and advanced playground and park facilities. Society members were especially impressed with the "permanency of parks and the intelligent way the parks department is taking advantage of sites by building proper structures on hillsides and preserving natural surroundings."[52]

See also was instrumental in instituting the park-schools project, jointly developed by the Department of Parks and the Board of Education in the early 1950s. The project grew out of a need for new parks and schools to accommodate the rapid increase in population following World War II. In the early years of the program, parks were developed on

[51] *Grand Rapids Press*, 14 July 1948:1.
[52] *Grand Rapids Press*, 15 September 1951:1.

cleared land adjacent to existing schools. New schools were constructed with parks as an integral part of the plan. By sharing the costs, the city and the public schools were able to create strong neighborhood centers and provide a playground within half a mile of every child. Grand Rapids was not the first city to have park-schools, but its program became a model for other cities.

V(E)(7) ***Zoo Development***

The menagerie that began with a pair of rabbits in 1890, grew the following year to include more rabbits, an eagle, owls, hawks, raccoons, squirrels, and a woodchuck. Late in 1891, the collection increased with the donation of two deer, the gift of Mayor Edwin F. Uhl and Alderman Isaac M. Turner. Alderman Turner boarded the deer in his barn until a pen could be constructed in the park. Chickens, guinea fowls, a pair of peacocks and squirrels joined the deer and rabbits in 1892.

By 1899, the menagerie included a herd of nine deer, three bears, a coyote, wolves, badgers, foxes, raccoons, eagles, peacocks, owls, geese, monkeys, parrots, alligators, macaws, cuckoos, guinea pigs and one wildcat. These animals were kept in cages or fenced areas in the general location now occupied by the current zoo and the slopes above it. Park patrons could view the animals while strolling along walkways and stairways with stone curbing and rustic wood railings which wound through the wooded hillside.

The city could not afford to feed the animals during the Depression and the zoo was almost completely emptied. When Frederick See became parks superintendent, his plan for the improvement of John Ball Park included reviving the zoo. In November 1949, Frederick A. Meyer became the zoo's first professional curator. Meyer came to Grand Rapids from Chicago, where he had been Education Director of the Lincoln Park Zoo. Prior to that Meyer had served as Curator of Reptiles and later Director of the Buffalo Municipal Zoo.

Monkey Island (1949) was the first new exhibit constructed. As part of the construction of a new entrance in 1952, spring water from the last of the "grottos" in the park was redirected to water fountains and a tap. That same year, the waterfowl and water animal exhibit, defined by a concrete and fieldstone wall with iron railings, was completed, new cages for foxes, badgers, coyotes, and other small animals were started, and John Ball Zoo was renamed the John Ball Zoological Gardens. Redevelopment of the zoo has continued through the years, bringing additional animal exhibits, a petting zoo, and an aquarium. Enclosure of the zoo for security purposes and charging of admission in the early 1970s, ended the previous open circulation system – isolating access to the Middle Knob of the bluff from the park.

Over the course of its long history, John Ball Park has been repeatedly threatened by development proposals. In 1905, the city turned down the Calder-Quinn Gypsum Company's offer of payment for the right to mine for gypsum under the park. During the 1960s, various proposals to take John Ball park land that included the construction of subsidized housing, a school and a stadium were successfully opposed. West Side residents fought long and hard in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the construction of US131 and I-196 through their neighborhoods. Hundreds of buildings and a section of John Ball Park fell before the bulldozers.

In 1898, a *Grand Rapids Press* editorial described John Ball as "the park of the people, and the people throng there on Sundays and week days. One does not go to John Ball park to spend money, but rather to breathe the fresh air of the hills, watch the fountains and drink in the beauties of nature. The rich and the poor alike can enjoy all that there is to be enjoyed, and nothing is closed against either. . ." More than one hundred years later that statement continues to be valid.

VI *Significance*

VI(A) *Selection Criteria*

Criteria of significance have been established by the National Park Service under which properties are judged to be eligible for listing in the Nation Register of Historic Places. These criteria are also used by the State of Michigan and the City of Grand Rapids in judging the eligibility of properties for historic designation. The National Register Criteria addresses the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture that is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, as well as:

A, Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
B. Association with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
D. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

"Historic landscapes include residential gardens and community parks, scenic highways, rural communities, institutional grounds, cemeteries, battlefields and zoological gardens. They are composed of a number of character-defining features which, individually or collectively contribute to the landscape's physical appearance as they have evolved over time. In addition to vegetation and topography, cultural landscapes may include water

features, such as ponds, streams, and fountains; circulation features, such as road, paths, steps, and walls; buildings; and furnishings, including fences, benches, lights and sculptural objects… An Historic Designed Landscape is a landscape that was consciously designed or laid out by a landscape architect, master gardener, architect, or horticulturist according to design principles, or an amateur gardener working in a recognized style or tradition. The landscape may be associated with a significant person(s), trend, or event in landscape architecture; or illustrate an important development in the theory and practice of landscape architecture. Aesthetic values play a significant role in designed landscapes. Examples include parks, campuses, and estates… Integrity is a property's historic identity evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics from the property's historic or pre-historic period. The seven qualities of integrity are location, setting, feeling, association, design, workmanship and materials. When evaluating these qualities, care should be taken to consider change itself. For example, when a second-generation woodland overtakes an open pasture in a battlefield landscape, or a woodland edge encloses a scenic vista. For situations such as these, the reversibility and/or compatibility of these features should be considered, both individually, and in the context of the overall landscape. Together evaluations of significance and integrity, when combined with historic research, documentation of existing conditions, and analysis findings, influence later treatment and interpretation decisions."[53]

"Although many historic landscapes are eligible for the National Register primarily on the merits of their design, a substantial number also possess significance in other areas. New York's Central Park, for example, has significance in social history and transportation, although its primary significance is landscape architecture… The specific features that a designed historic landscape must retain will differ for various landscape types. Such features may include, but are not necessarily limited to, spatial relationships, vegetation, original property boundary, topography/grading, site-furnishings, design intent, architectural features, and circulation system… All the information required to demonstrate the significance of a designed historic landscape will vary according to whether it is significant to the local community, the State, or the nation… In addition to establishing the reasons for a designed landscape's significance, it is also necessary to determine if the designed landscape is significant for its original or altered character or both. Although a landscape need not retain all the characteristic features that (see list above) it had during its period(s) of significance, it must retain enough or have restored enough of the essential features to make its historic character clearly recognizable, and these features should be identified… In most instances the original boundaries of the landscape design will define the limits of the geographic area to be evaluated. Landscapes not determined to be especially significant should be reevaluated when they are fifty years old. (See National Register Bulletin 22. How to Evaluate and Nominate Potential National Register Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years for a more detailed discussion of the evaluation process for properties that are less than fifty years old.)"[54]

[53] PB 36.
[54] NRB 18.

VI(B) ***Determination of Significance***

VI(B)(1) *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Grand Rapids history:*

John Ball Park is historically significant under Criterion A: community planning and development, entertainment/recreation, landscape architecture, and social history.

VI(B)(2) *Association with the lives of persons significant in Grand Rapids' past*.

John Ball Park is historically significant under Criterion B: John Ball, Wencel Cukierski, and Eugene Goebel.

VI(B)(3) *Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction:*

John Ball Park is historically significant under Criterion C: The site embodies the distinctive characteristics of an American urban "country Park" as interpreted through Olmsted and City Beautiful design concepts.

VI(C) ***Typically Excluded Properties***

The site is not a type which is typically excluded from historic designation.

VI(D) ***Integrity***

VI(D)(1) *Integrity Criteria*

"Integrity is a property's historic identity evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics from the property's historic or pre-historic period. The seven qualities of integrity are location, setting, feeling, association, design, workmanship and materials. All seven qualities do not need to be present as long as the overall sense of past time and place is evident. When evaluating these qualities, care should be taken to consider change itself. For example, when a second-generation woodland overtakes an open pasture in a battlefield landscape, or a woodland edge encloses a scenic vista. For situations such as these, the reversibility and/or compatibility of those feature should be considered, both individually, and in the context of the overall landscape. Together, evaluations of significance and integrity, when combined with historic research, documentation of existing conditions, and analysis finds, influence later treatment and interpretation decisions."[55]

[55] PB 36; NRB 16A:4.

The clearest evaluation of integrity is based on the presence of identifiable components of the original design. To evaluate the historic integrity of a designed landscape, it is useful to compare the present appearance and function of the landscape to its historical appearance and function. The relationship between present function and that intended or actually in use during the period of significance may also affect the integrity of a designed historic landscape. An area that was designed for passive recreation may have suffered a loss of integrity if it has been converted for active play such as baseball. On the other hand, an open meadow within a large estate or institutional grounds may survive adaptive use [for] a golf course without loss of integrity if its open design qualities remain dominant.[56]

VI(D)(2) ***Qualities of Integrity***

VI(D)(2)(a) *Location*

The proposed historic district remains in its original location. Where individual historic resources, such as the John Ball Statue and the Aldrich Memorial have been moved within the site, the objects in their new location continue to bear a significant relationship to the district as a whole.

VI(D)(2)(b) *Design*

The overall design scheme of the urban country park, as implemented in the Goebel plan, has been preserved in its significant features. The park avoids formal design except in very limited areas about buildings, the open lawns and meadows in the central areas remain, and circulation is provided by means of organically curving and wide sweeping roads and paths. Open space is pastoral, softly meandering, and tree-formed. Landscape design emphasizes natural Midwestern forms. Playgrounds, recreational facilities, and other structures are integrated into the naturalistic meadows, fields, glades, groves, and ravines as called for by the naturalistic design.

Existing intact historic design features include the bluff line throughout the site, the south meadow, the south grove, the woodland glade, the east meadow, the east grove, the north pond with its plantings, the Pavilion, the rose garden, the band shell, the north shelter, the lookout shelter on the south knob, the John Ball Statue, the Aldrich Memorial, the waterfowl and water animal ponds, and the curvilinear path and stairway system.

Existing historic features which have undergone modification, but still retain a substantial relationship to the original design are the curvilinear roadway system, the south pond, the zoo entrance, the middle ravine and its tributary draws, the south draw, and the Monkey Island.

Non-historic resources within the site are the former zoo education building, the zoo hospitals, the Nawara Memorial Fountain, the aquarium, the children's zoo and bird

[56] NRB 18:5.

aviaries, the newer exhibit structures in the middle ravine and its tributary draws, the amphitheater, the concession building, and the east and hilltop parking lots.

By and large, change has been managed so as to preserve the most significant design features. Post-1952 development in the middle ravine is, in part, naturalistically conceived and follows the contours of the landscape. Non-contributing features in the middle ravine zoo development are hidden from view within the natural folds of the bluffs and do not intrude on the historic appearance of the site as a whole. Similarly, design efforts were made to integrate the east and hilltop parking lots within the original design.

VI(D)(2)(c) *Setting*

The proposed district maintains integrity of setting. The significant historic orientation of the district is to the east toward the city. Here the original setting of four-square and bungalow style single-family houses on small lots, churches and neighborhood commercial buildings remains substantially intact, as do the vistas to the east of downtown and the East Bluffs. The placement of the I-196 freeway in the 1960s through a cut in the bluffs west of the district has little visual or auditory impact on the setting, as the bluffs themselves serve as a buffer.

VI(D)(2(d) *Materials*

The materials of the historic building, structure, and object resources in the park remain substantially as in the period of significance, as does the park vegetation.

VI(D)(2)(e) *Workmanship*

The Eugene Goebel design reflects a high level of workmanship in the urban country park, Olmstead, City Beautiful tradition. Individual buildings and structures from different times in the period of significance vary in workmanship, but integrate well into the master design.

VI(D)(2)(f) *Feeling*

The site retains a high level of feeling. They physical characteristics of the site, taken together, effectively convey the site's historic character as an urban country park.

VI(D)(2)(g) *Association*

The site is sufficiently intact to convey to the observer its relationship to the development in Grand Rapids of the public park system, the City Beautiful plan, and the playground movement. The site retains a high degree of association.

VI(E) *Finding as to Significance*

The site is a locally significant designed historic landscape. The overall sense of the past time and place of the period of significance is evident.

The proposed district consists of one (1) historic site, of the type designed historic landscape.

VII *Recommendations*

VII(A) The Study Committee recommends that the area described as: beginning at the corner of West Fulton Street and Valley Avenue; then west to John Ball Park Drive NW; then north to the Gerald R. Ford Freeway (I-196); then along the freeway to Butterworth Street SW; then east to John Ball Park Drive SW; then north to Park Street SW; then east to Valley Avenue SW; then north to the place of beginning, be designated as the John Ball Park Historic District pursuant to the provisions of the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Ordinance.

VII(B) The Study Committee recommends that the preparation of a Cultural Landscape Report, as described in *National Park Service Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes, Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes*, be authorized and funded in order to provide managers, curators, and others with information needed to make management decisions, to provide new information about the landscape's historic significance and integrity, and to serve as a tool to protect the landscape's character defining features from undue wear, alteration, or loss.

VII(C) The Study Committee recommends that the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Commission affirm the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes for purposes of administering a Grand Rapids Historic District which is a cultural landscape.

APPENDIX A

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Response to Comments

During the review period following the release of its preliminary study report and at a public hearing, the John Ball Park Historic District Study Committee received both oral and written comments relative to the report. Documented corrections, as well as clarifications, have been incorporated into the final report. This is a summary of comments received and the study committee's response.

Comment: *Historic preservation law applies to buildings and structures, but not to sites or landscapes.*

Response: The study committee disagrees. The preservation of historic cultural landscapes of local, state, or national significance has a high priority in preservation law. See, for example, the following publications of the National Park Service: Historic Landscape Initiative; The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes; National Register Bulletin, No. 18. Technical information on the National Register of Historic Places: How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes; Preservation Bulletin 36, Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes.

"Like other historic properties, America's historic landscapes are subject to loss and change through inappropriate uses, insensitive development, vandalism, and natural forces such as flooding . . . The National Park Service (NPS) Historic Landscape Initiative promotes responsible preservation practices that protect our nation's irreplaceable legacy – designed landscapes such as parks and gardens, as well as vernacular historic landscapes such as farms and industrial sites."[57]

Comment: *The study committee should have included a 36 CFR Certified Landscape Architect.*

Response: The Michigan Historic District Study Committee process has operated since its inception largely on a volunteer basis. This is distinct from the National Register nomination process and the Cultural Landscape Report process, which are often funded by private or government sources due to the involvement of federal tax credits or government funding for environmental review of federal projects. However, even the National Register Nomination process does not require that a nomination for a designed historic landscape be prepared by a 36 CFR certified landscape architect. The National Park Service "recommends" that a National Register Nomination be prepared by a person "knowledgeable in the history of landscape architecture, gardening, and planning; and should have academic backgrounds or experience in such fields and disciplines as

[57] Historic Landscape Initiative, National Park Service

landscape architecture, landscape architectural history, architectural history, art history, American studies, cultural geography, archeology, horticulture, or historic preservation.[58]

The study committee did meet these recommended standards for qualifications for preparation of a national register nomination for a designed historic landscape.

However, whether or not the city commission passes an ordinance creating an historic district, the study committee recommends that a Cultural Landscape Report be authorized and funded in order to provide a sound basis for preservation planning for John Ball Park and zoo.

Comment: *The study failed to adhere to guidelines established by the Secretary of the Interior for evaluation of proposed historic districts and standard research protocol.*

Response: As noted above, the study was not a National Register Nomination and not a Cultural Landscape Report. The study was a local historic district study conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act and the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Ordinance. As such, the report followed the requirements for format and content contained at MCL 399.203(d) and City Code 5.398(1)(d). In so doing, the study committee was guided by the selection criteria issued by the United States Department of the Interior for inclusion of resources in the national register of historic places, as set forth in 36 CFR and criteria in *National Register Bulletin, No. 18, How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes*, National Park Service. The format for a historic district study committee report differs from the format for a National Register Nomination and the study committee followed the former format as that which directly applies to the purpose and scope of the recommendation. §§ 203(1)(d)(vi) and 5.398(1)(d)(vi). In order to make clearer the relation between the state/local format and the federal format, the final report has been modified to insert references to the federal format at the proper points.

In the view of the study committee, the final report meets the recommendations of Bulletin 18 for purposes of application to a local historic district study report. Nevertheless, for purposes of a local historic district study report Bulletin 18 remains not more than a "guide," §§203(1)(C) and 5.398(1)(C).

Comment: *Historical documentation relative to John Ball and the social history of the park as it functioned in the neighborhood in the context of the American parks movement is irrelevant to historic significance.*

Response: The study committee disagrees. "Although many historic landscapes are eligible for the National Register primarily on the merits of their design, a substantial number also possess significance in other areas. New York's Central Park, for example, has significance in social history and transportation, although its primary significance is

[58] National Register Bulletin, No. 18. Technical Information on the National Register of Historic Places: Survey, Evaluation, Registration, and Preservation of Cultural Resources, Department of the Interior, National Park Service

landscape architecture."[59]

"Many designed historic landscapes will be eligible because of their association with significant events and trends. For example, the creation of designed landscapes has historically been associated with social movements. The historic designs for parks…and playgrounds have direct links, in many cases, to the social issues of their times."[60]

"All the information required to demonstrate the significance of a designed historic landscape will vary according to whether it is significant to the local community, the state, or the nation."[61]

The significance of John Ball as a figure of local historic significance is beyond dispute. The social history of the park as it reflected the evolution of the theory of the American urban park from the American Romantic, the City Beautiful, the national playground movement, the zoological park, and, not least important, the confrontation between park values and the automobile, and the expression of these theories in the existing landscape, amply support the local historic significance of the park.

Comment: *John Ball Park cannot be a significant historic designed landscape because it has changed over time.*

Response: "In addition to establishing the reasons for a designed landscape's significance, it is also necessary to determine if the designed landscape is significant for its original or altered character or both."[62]

"The seven qualities of integrity are location, setting, feeling, association, design, workmanship and materials. When evaluating these qualities, care should be taken to consider change itself."[63]

Comment: *The study committee should have reviewed the records of the John Ball Zoological Society.*

Response: When preparing the preliminary report the study committee contacted the Zoological Society and was told that all its historic records had been given to the Local History Department. After receiving the comment that it failed to review Society records, the study committee requested the opportunity to do so. Permission for general research was denied, but the Society eventually agreed to copy any materials pre-identified by the study committee. Since the committee did not know what materials were available in Society archives, it asked for a list of those materials in its collection. The Society responded by sending copies of newspaper articles documenting corrections it had pointed out in the preliminary report relative to the zoo. This additional

[59] National Register Bulletin, No. 18, Introduction.
[60] Id., (4).
[61] Id., (2).
[62] Preservation Bulletin 36, Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes, NPS
[63] National Register Bulletin, No. 18.

information has been incorporated into the final report.

Comment: *The preliminary report contains errors in the chronology and materials of the zoo structures.*

Response: Identification, chronology, and description of the zoo structures have been clarified in the final report. Incorrect construction dates have been corrected. In cases where the preliminary report referred to the original name of exhibits, the current use has been added. For example, the otter pool referred to in the preliminary report, which was part of the 1952 waterfowl and water animal exhibit has been re-identified to avoid confusion with the 1981 otter pool. Also, the "Animal Cages" of 1954 are still extant and form a defining characteristic of the Middle Ravine. However, they have been modified. Similar clarifications have been made throughout the final report.

Comment*: There are no accepted standards of treatment of an historically designated park.*

Response: The study committee disagrees. The United States Secretary of the Interior has published *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. In its final report the study committee recommends that the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Commission affirm the application of the Secretary's Guidelines to cultural landscapes designated under the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Comment: *The study committee consists primarily of persons who support historic preservation.*

Response: Both state law and the Grand Rapids Historic Preservation Ordinance require that a study committee be composed of a "majority of persons who have a clearly demonstrated interest in or knowledge of historic preservation" and "shall contain representation from one or more duly organized local historic preservation organizations." The final study report has been expanded to include the qualifications of the committee members to demonstrate that the requirements of state and city law have been met.

Comment: *The study committee includes a neighborhood activist, but not a zoo representative.*

Response: The study committee included persons both with a demonstrated interest in the neighborhood and a demonstrated interest in the zoo. In addition to their demonstrated interests these persons have additional qualifications. Peter Carlberg is a Grand Rapids Planning Commissioner. Phyllis Ball is the widow of a grandson of John Ball and the mother and grandmother of four great-and numerous great-great grandchildren of John Ball. She and her family are members of the Zoo Society.