

Looking Back on the History of Michigan State Parks

By: Kay Duncan, Association Secretary, June 2019

In May 1919, Michigan's Legislature established the State Park Commission and May 12, 2019 marked the official Centennial Anniversary date of Michigan's State Parks System. This article features State Parks abundant history to honor their Centennial Anniversary. It took extensive reading of donated memorabilia and historical documents to find the best written information and articles on Michigan State Parks. Research found excellent biennial reports, pamphlets, brochures, photos, and articles written by Parks staff decades ago, and much of the information used by this columnist is over fifty years old. There will be a memorabilia table dedicated to Parks history at the Retirees Annual September gathering.

The most informative article was authored by Jim Hane, Lansing Parks Division employee written for the State Parks 65th Anniversary and featured in the October 1984 DNR Natural Resources Register. It reveals a story about our State Park System from the beginning through 1984. Several paragraphs from Jim's article are shared in this column.

The historical keeper of records for Parks Division was Bill Cornish with pamphlets/brochures dating back to 1937. The first two publications authored by W. J. Kingscott are the 1937-38 and 1941-42 Parks Division Biennial reports. The 1941 report revealed WWII had a negative impact on state parks construction due to lack of manpower and materials. Our men and women were called to war causing a big drop in park attendance in 1942. Nine state parks were closed due low visits and CCC and WPA workers camps were closed. A biennial report in 1957-58 authored by Arthur C. Elmer reported in 1957, the outdoor center at W. J. Hayes State Park burned to ground but insurance money paid to rebuild. In 1958, park attendance and boating, and launch use administered by Parks Division was now at an all-time high. There was increased use and overcrowding of park outdoor centers (known as group camps) by student campers from 173 Michigan schools and nearly 12,000 students using the camps. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not approve any appropriations for park improvements or land acquisition in 1958.

The third-best history contribution comes from our own faithful association retiree Bill Kusey, an experienced high-spirited recreational land planner. He was manager of four state parks, Region II Asst. Park Supr. and retired as Park Supr. in 1988 from Marquette Reg I. Bill enjoyed his 34-year career with DNR and believes MI Parks system is the best in the U.S. He holds a framed collection of MI State Park vehicle stickers—displaying the first one issued in 1961 through 2010—impressive. Bill and his late wife Marietta camped at Young State Park for 50 consecutive years and in 2015 they donated funds to build two wheelchair ramps to access Lake Charlevoix at Young State Park.

Jim Hane's 1984 article highlights lands dedicated for state parks span the length and breadth of the State. They stretch from historic Fort Wilkins State Park, to the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula, to the sandy Lake Michigan shores at Warren Dunes State Park, and the Lake Erie Beaches of Sterling State Park in southeastern Michigan. Michigan's park system features 115 miles of prime Great Lakes frontage and over 200 miles of scenic inland lakes and rivers. It embraces 248,300 acres of choice land approximately six percent of the state-owned public domain. The process of adding park land has been a continuous one, beginning in 1920. A few parks were established as a result of the tax reversion program prevalent in Depression years. In early years, parks were small. Many were given as gifts to the state by individuals, state agencies, or local governments.

Mackinaw Island State Park was established when the Legislature created Mackinac Island State Park Commission in 1895. The first park established was Interlochen State Park in Grand Traverse County purchased through Legislative appropriation in 1917, and transferred to the park system from the Public Domain Commission. P.J. Hoffmaster became the first state parks superintendent in 1922. Thirty-three parks existing today trace back to 1920s, another six to the 1930s. Twenty more came in the 1950s. Today, Michigan has more than 100 State Parks.

Jim Hanes wrote about the various methods of how park lands are acquired, and often contain special clauses in their deeds such as the "reverter clause." If the land is used for nonpark purposes, it reverts to the original owner or the successors. Several state park deeds require that the donor's name be in perpetual use, i.e. Young State Park and Walter J. Hayes State Park. Park master plans are prepared for each park and kept current. Parks are used year around to include swimming, picnicking, camping, boating, fishing, hiking, nature study, and fall activity includes hunting. Michigan maintains nearly 85 percent of its acreage open to the hunter, closing portions where safety is a factor. Parks play an important role in our State tourism, preserving the outstanding scenic and historic sites, and providing recreational opportunities for all to enjoy.

One topic to mention is the outstanding work done at our State Parks by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) created in 1933 under President F.D. Roosevelt. The CCC performed work on a variety of Michigan projects from 1933-1942. They planted 485 million trees, spent 140,000 days fighting forest fires, constructed 7,000 miles of truck trails, built 504 bridges and constructed 222 buildings. The CCC workers constructed many log and fieldstone structures in several parks that include showcase cabins and lodges for park caretakers and beach and bath houses for park users. Outstanding buildings are at Ludington State Park, a picnic shelter at Indian Lake State Park, several cabins at Bewabic and Wilderness State Parks, beach house at Wilson State Park, and a magnificent home at Hoeft State Park.

Below is excerpt of columns taken from the 1937-38 Biennial Parks Division report showing how State Parks acquired its land. The dates of acquisition range from 1919 to 1938.

County	State Park	How Acquired	County	State Park	How Acquired
St. Clair	Algonac	Purchase	Mason	Ludington	County Gift, Private donations, part State purchase, exchange/delinquent tax land
Cheboygan	Aloha	Gift from Cheboygan County	Emmet	Magnus	Gift from J. A. Magnus 7 A and delinquent tax land 6 A
Baraga	Baraga	Gift from Baraga County	Marquette	Marquette	Gift from Marquette County
Bay	Bay City	Gift from City of Bay City, part purchase by State, part exchange	Oceana	Chas. Mears	Gift from Carrie Mears
Benzie	Benzie	Gift from John W. Dye & wife, Exchange and Tax delinquent land	Houghton	F.J. McLain	Delinquent tax land, 142 acres, Gift from Houghton County 196 Acres
Oakland	Bloomer No. 1, 2, 3, 4	Gift from Howard B. Bloomer & Wife	Wexford	Wm. Mitchell	Gift from Wm. Mitchell, 26 A, & City of Cadillac 95 A
Chippewa	Brimley	Gift and Brimley Commercial Club, and Village of Brimley	Muskegon	Muskegon	Gift from various Muskegon Cnty, & Cities 802 acres; State purchase 388 acres, delinquent tax land 7 acres
Cheboygan	Burt Lake	Gift from Cheboygan County, Tax delinquent land 80 acres	Leelanau	North Port Park Site	Gift from US Government
Cheboygan	Cheboygan	Gift from City of Cheboygan	Oceana	Oceana County Site	Gift 192 acres and part purchase from U.S. Government 927 Acres
Leelanau	D. H. Day	Gift from D.H. Day and wife	Gr. Traverse	Old Mission Park	Gift from the US Government
Oakland	Dodge Bros. No. 2 - 7	Gift from Dodge Brothers Corp.	Presque Isle	Onaway	Gift from county and private donations
Macomb	Dodge Bros. No. 8	Gift from Dodge Brothers Corp.	Manistee	Orchard Beach	Gift from Chamber of Commerce Manistee, pt. purchase
Monroe	Dodge Bros. No. 9	Gift from Dodge Brothers Corp.	Alpena	Ossineke	Purchased and Tax Delinquent land
Oakland	Dodge Bros. No. 10	Gift from Dodge Brothers Corp.	Otsego	Otsego Lake	Gift from Otsego County and City of Gaylord
Chippewa	Dodge Bros Munuscong Bay	Gift Dodge Bros. Corp. 2,300 acres, Delinquent tax land 1,456 acres	Schoolcraft	Palms Book	Deq. Tax Land 328A, Gifted Palms Book Land Co. 89 A
Iosco	East Tawas	Gift from City of East Tawas	Mason	Pere Marquette River Park Sites	Delinquent Tax Land 185A, Gifted Michigan Power and Light Company 310 Acres
Presque Isle	F. W. Fletcher	Gift from F. W. Fletcher	Alger	Pictured Rocks	Gift from Alger County 27A, Delinquent Tax Land 185A
Keweenaw	Fort Wilkins	Gift from U.S. Government	Cheboygan	Poe Reef Park Site	Gift from US Government
Gladwin	Gladwin	Gift from City of Gladwin	Houghton	Portage River Park	Gift from US Government
Gogebic	Gogebic Lake	Gift from Gogebic County and Private donations	Oceana	Silver Lake	Gift from Carrie Mears
Ottawa	Grand Haven	Gift from City of Grand Haven, Gift from US Government, and 1937 Purchase land	St. Clair	St. Clair	Gift from County of St. Clair
Alger	Grand Marais Park Site	Gift from Burt Twp., Alger County 29 acres, by exchange 1,728 acres	Monroe	Sterling	134 Acres Gift of City and Private Corporation, 245 acres Leased, 150 Acres Purchased
Alcona	Harrisville	Gift from Harrisville	Mackinac	Straits	Gift from City St Ignore and Private Donations
Crawford	Hartwick Pines	Delinquent tax land 151 acres, Gift from Mrs. Karen Hartwick 8,182 acres, part purchase 143 acres, exchange 120 acres.	Gr. Traverse	Traverse City	Gift from Chamber of Commerce
Jackson Lenawee Washtenaw	Walter J. Hayes	Private donations 170 acres, part purchase by State 115 Acres, Gift from Miss M.J. Hayes 120 acres	Van Buren	Van Buren	Delinquent Tax Land 100 Acres, Gift of County 16 acres
Roscommon	Higgins Lake	Delinquent tax land, by exchange and part purchase	Iosco	Van Etten Lake	Withdrawn tax homestead land
Presque Isle	P. H. Hoeft	Gift from P. H. Hoeft and Wife	Berrien	Warren Dunes	Lease from E. K. Warren Foundation
Ottawa	Holland	Gift from City of Holland and private donations	Emmet	Wilderness	Delinquent Tax Land 4,760 acres, 640 acres purchased by State, Exchange 969 Acres
Huron	Huron	Gift from U.S. Govn. via Huron County	Menominee	J. W. Wells	Gifted J.W. Wells Estate, 467 A, & part purchase by State 11 Acres, and Exchange 40 Acres
Schoolcraft	Indian Lake	By Exchange	Newaygo	White Cloud	Gift from the City of White Cloud
Gr. Traverse	Interlochen	By Purchase	Clare	Wilson	Gift from the City of Harrison
Livingston	Island Lake	Gift from Dodge Bros.. and Part Purchase	Charlevoix	Young	Gift City of Boyne City 242 A, and part purchase by
Missaukee	Lake City	Gift from City of Lake City and private donations, 17 acres, delinquent tax land 304 acres	Houghton	Sidnaw	Gift from Scully Steel & Iron Co. and others 559 A; and Delinquent Tax Land 994 Acres

Interesting Parks Story in the Petoskey News-Review on May 7, 2019 sent by Sam Milstein

**STATE PARK MEMORIES:
Babe Ruth arrested for fishing violations**

Babe Ruth, the famous New York Yankees slugger, was not as good a fisherman as he was a ballplayer. During the summer of 1926, he violated Michigan’s game and fish laws by fishing at Island Lake Recreation Area before the fishing season officially had begun. Babe went fishing with teammate Pat Sexton from the porch of the Island Lake Hotel and was caught with 25 bass and bluegill before the official June 16 start of the fishing season. The game warden arrested both of them and seized their tackle, but not their catch. They were released and even made it back to the game in Detroit that afternoon.



In August 1926, Babe was summoned to appear in court in Brighton by A.B. Wilkinson, the conservation officer for Oakland and Livingston counties. Babe was charged with three violations: fishing without a license, fishing out of season and taking undersized fish from Island Lake. Wilkinson held a warrant for Babe when the latter came back to Detroit to play a game. Wilkinson even threatened to arrest Babe if he did not “make a satisfactory answer.” On Aug. 5, when the Yankees came to Detroit from Cleveland, Babe went right to bed. He was awakened to be told that he might be arrested. Babe’s response? Go back to bed, of course!

Below is a showcase of historical state park photos. Spotlighted are magnificent state park structures built between 1933-42 by CCC men; a collection of vehicle park stickers, and a typical 1950s Michigan state park campsite.



Original Ludington State Park Bathhouse in Mason County



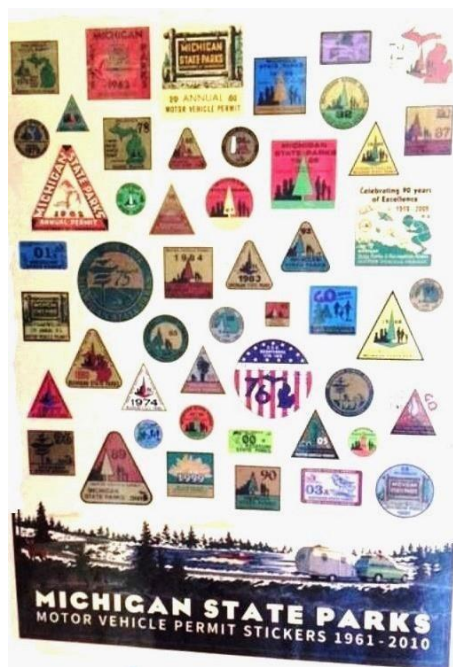
P. H. Hoeft State Park in Presque Isle County



Original Outdoor Theatre “Interlochen Bowl” built approximately 1928



1950s typical State Park campsite occupied



State Park Vehicle Stickers 1961-2010 courtesy of Bill Kusey



Otsego State Park in Otsego County