A History of Bronson Park, Kalamazoo, Michigan from 1829 to 1940

Carol Knauss

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A HISTORY OF BRONSON PARK, KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN
FROM 1829 TO 1940

by

Carol Knauss

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Western Michigan University
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Bronson Park is a 3.6-acre tract of land in the center of downtown Kalamazoo. For over 130 years the city has used this land for a public park. The land originally was donated to the county for a school and a jail by the men who owned and platted the area. Interested citizens converted the two squares into a park which, in the following years, was improved with trees, walks, and a fountain. This park became an important meeting place for the villagers who held political rallies and celebrations there. From 1829 to 1940 both the appearance and the way people used the park changed. Grand private residences around the park were replaced by public buildings. Various citizen groups placed memorials in the park. Large celebrations were moved to places with more space. The W.P.A. projects of the late 1930s brought new life to the park with a total refurbishing and a new fountain. The new civic auditorium and a W.P.A. sponsored county building completed the setting for Bronson Park as the focus of a government/cultural center in Kalamazoo. But through all the changes Bronson Park remained a special place in the concern and affection of the Kalamazoo citizens.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I also wish to thank my advisors, Peter Schmitt and Larry Massie, for their helpful editorial suggestions.

My heartfelt personal appreciation goes to my various friends and relations who were always there to lend an ear.

Carol Knauss
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INTRODUCTION

Just south of Michigan Avenue in Kalamazoo lies a green shady rectangle called Bronson Park. Along the western and northern sides are four stately churches and a sand-colored Art Deco county building. A large glass and chrome business complex, a brick Y.W.C.A., a parking lot and a public library/museum fill the Rose Street frontage to the east. The lots along South Street are occupied by an old residence converted into a private club, a city hall, a church, an auditorium, and an art center. Each of these public buildings looks out over the neat pathways and trees of Bronson Park. Alongside picnic tables, park benches, and trash cans in the park are a variety of historic markers commemorating noteworthy events or individuals. In one corner of the park is a grassy, circular mound about four feet high, believed to have been built by prehistoric Indians. The paths of the park converge in the center at two fountain sculptures. To the east is Alfonso Ianelli's Pioneer Fountain, designed to incorporate earlier electrically lighted waterworks. In what was originally a reflecting pool for Ianelli's fountain, Kirk Newman created a series of bronze figures of small children.

The people of Kalamazoo have been using Bronson Park for well over a century for political rallies, picnics, concerts, fairs, celebrations, and relaxation. But how many of the citizens today
are aware that the area was not originally intended to be a park? It was designed to hold a school and a jail. Only by conscious effort were these buildings removed and the land converted into a park. Its fate in the early days was uncertain, but the citizens liked the idea of a New England-style commons in the village center. Affluent gentlemen built their homes across the park from the churches and courthouse.

The city preserved Bronson Park for the next 130 years by responding to the changing needs of the people. The park's appearance altered as did the purposes for which it was used. But the significance of the park lies in the fact that it remained an important place in the heart of the city and of the people. The green, open space survived. This paper is a history of the development of Bronson Park from its beginning in 1829 to the start of the second World War. The park started as an unmowed field and ended as the focus of a cultural/governmental center. Although further changes have taken place since 1940, these have merely reaffirmed Bronson Park's role as of that time.
CHAPTER I

1829-1844

Titus Bronson traveled through what is now downtown Kalamazoo in 1829. He camped near the Indian mound and at some point resolved to live there. Bronson's vision of a village at that location took shape when he and his brother-in-law, Stephen Richardson, filed a plat map on 12 March 1831. Their 160 acres, including Bronson's original campsite, was located in southwest quarter of Section 15 Township 2 South, Range 11 West in the County of Kalamazoo. Bronson took the east 80 acres and Richardson kept the west half. Thus the town was platted, its streets laid out in a grid pattern, and four prime sixteen-rod lots donated for public use. Sites on the south side of Main Street were reserved for the first four religious organizations electing to build. The square to the east of this was designated Public Square or Courthouse Square. Directly south of the Church Square was land for a public jail and the fourth area was named Academy Square. Bronson promised to "donate ample

1Quarter Centennial Celebration of the Settlement of Kalamazoo, Michigan. Published by Order of the Board of Directors of the Ladies' Library Association (Kalamazoo: Gazette Print, 1855), pp. 14-16.

2Plat of the Town of Bronson, March 12, 1831 by Bronson and Richardson Twp 2 South Range 11. West Southwest Quarter of Section 15 in the County of Kalamazoo, 1831.
lands for county purposes; also for the use of the common schools and an academy; for a public burial ground, and for the use of the first four Christian denominations which should erect houses of worship." These donations proved to be an inducement for the commissioners to locate the county seat in Kalamazoo. Two of these squares thus given to the village were later diverted from their original purposes, and became Bronson Park.

On 3 March 1835, the Board of Supervisors discussed the first county jail which they planned to build on the southwestern square. Rix Robinson suggested the following inscription be entered:

Thirty-two feet by sixteen, one story high, and divided into two apartments; one of which is to be twenty feet by sixteen, and framed in a substantial and workmanlike manner; the other is to be twelve feet by sixteen, of sound white-oak timber of same quality and dimensions. The whole to be well boarded with good whitewood siding planed, and covered with pine shingles in a workmanlike manner. The door of jail-room to be composed of plank, three inches thick, doubled and riveted. In the other apartment are to be three windows, each fifteen 'lites', 'eight by ten inches'.

This building was erected in 1835 by David Hubbard on ground just east of the Indian mound. The mound itself served as the cellar of the jail. From all accounts the citizens were never very satisfied with this first jail; the criminals found it possible to come and go as it suited them. James M. Thomas, author of the 1869

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4Ibid., p. 110.
Kalamazoo County History, described this building as "a very poor apology for a prison." Following the general consensus, the county demolished the structure ten years later and built a new one on Court House Square.

Eighteen thirty-five proved a pivotal point for the village's future when the Federal Land Office in Michigan was moved from White Pigeon to Bronson. Wildcat fever struck and land speculation was rampant. A "tent city" blossomed in the park and on every vacant lot. Thomas Durant, author of the 1880 Kalamazoo County History, estimated that nearly $4,000,000 passed through the Kalamazoo Land Office. This sudden influx of speculators and settlers accelerated the growth of the village.

The following year the legislature authorized the County of Kalamazoo to borrow $6,000 for county buildings. A square had already been designated for a courthouse in the original plat map. By 1837 a two-story white frame building stood on this Court House Square. Justus Burdick contracted for, and E. R. Ball built, the courthouse. The pattern was beginning to form—key buildings on

5James M. Thomas, comp., Kalamazoo County Directory with a History of the County From Its Earliest Settlement Containing Descriptions of Each Town and Village Within the County. Also, the Names of All Persons Residing in the Several Villages in the County. 1869 and 1870. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: James M. Thomas, 1869).

6History of Kalamazoo, 1880, p. 232.

7Thomas, Kalamazoo County, 1869, p. 70.
or around the village's central squares.

Bronson had named the southeasternmost of the four squares Academy Square and it was not long before the citizens of Kalamazoo became interested in utilizing the area for that purpose. On 22 April 1833, the Territory granted the original charter to the Michigan and Huron Institute. This was the first classical education institution in the state. The University of Michigan was soon organized and proposed to cover the same area as the Michigan and Huron Institute. The regents of the University of Michigan set out to establish branches in various parts of the state and they selected Kalamazoo as one of the sites. It was one of the branch schools that opened its doors on 1 May 1838 on Academy Square, the corner of Rose Street and Academy Street. The structure was not imposing; a former student described it as "plain and unpretending." The student also talked about the "memory of its whit­tled pine benches, and cracked and dingy walls." When classes were held there, the boys were housed on the ground floor and the girls taught on the upper level.

The "Old Branch" apparently had some trouble with enrollment

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8 *History of Kalamazoo, 1880*, p. 140.


10 Ibid.
at first as many Kalamazoo citizens saw the school as a usurper of the local-based Michigan and Huron Institute. In 1839 therefore, a merger of the Branch and the Institute took place.

James A. B. Stone and his wife, Lucinda H. Stone, took over the instruction of the joint institute and they remained active in Kalamazoo education for the next twenty years.

The melding of the two schools did not last for long and the regents of the University of Michigan soon withdrew their financial aid. The Regents had found that they could not afford to open the University at Ann Arbor and maintain the branches. So they abolished the branch system. Yet the Stones and the Institute continued to flourish and a second site was purchased on the west side of the village. The western college building served the purposes of the boys' education, and while the eastern or Ladies' College was being built, the "Old Branch" was used by the female department. The 1880 County History contains a lengthy reminiscence about the Branch from which the following was selected:

The course of instruction was ample and most thorough. It embraced, to those who wished it, the college curriculum. To have come from the Kalamazoo branch for admission to the University at Ann Arbor was ever prima facie evidence, with the faculty at the latter, of good scholarship. . . . The students, as we have said, could prepare here for the University or any other college; or they could go on here in the course and enter the sophomore or junior class at the University; or they could graduate here, the text books corresponding with those at the University.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\)History of Kalamazoo, 1880, p. 43.
The author of the 1869 Kalamazoo County History included a statement of "local habitation" and name of every householder in Bronson for the year 1835.\textsuperscript{12} A picture of the early residences facing what was to become Bronson Park can be deduced from this list. Jonathan Abbott was the village's first doctor, arriving in 1831. He also had the distinction of being appointed the first postmaster of the United States Post Office at Bronson. This distinguished early settler lived on the southeast corner of Park Street and South Street. His nearest neighbors, Martin Heydenburk and J. P. Warner, lived on the east corner of Church Street. Cyrus Lovell, another important Kalamazoo figure, built his home on the corner of Rose Street and South Street. Henry Gilbert resided across the street on the opposite corner.

According to plan, Church Square was to be occupied by the first four Christian religious groups to ask for the sites. On 22 March 1837 a number of citizens signed the articles of association for the parish of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. That same year a church building was constructed on the northwest corner of the square. The congregation tacked on an addition in the summer of 1840. However, the whole structure proved unsatisfactory and as early as 1846 the Episcopalians removed it to make way for a new church.

\textsuperscript{12}Thomas, \textit{Kalamazoo County}, 1869, p. 59.
The Methodists had organized in 1833, but not until the spring of 1842 did they dedicate their church on the southeast corner of Church Square. This was the first church to actually face the park, but the Methodists did not remain long. After selling both the land and the structure in 1866, they built a new church on the corner of Rose Street and Lovell Street.

In pioneer times the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches worked together, often joining in a common building. Kalamazoo being no exception, the church was organized on 6 June 1835 under the Presbyterian form of government. The joint congregation located their first church on South Street. However, there was considerable friction between the two groups and the Congregational form was adopted instead by 1842. Apparently this widened the rift between the members of the congregation until, finally, the split became permanent. The acting pastor, Reverend Ova P. Hoyt, along with fifty former members, withdrew to organize a Presbyterian Church in 1849. A church had been erected the previous year on the corner of Rose Street and South Street, so services were begun at once. This building which faced the park was enlarged to house the growing membership in 1860. Meanwhile, a new Congregational Church was built in 1852 on the northeast corner of Academy Street and Park Street. The Baptist Church filled the fourth space on Church Square thus completing Bronson's original plan.

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13 *History of Kalamazoo, 1880*, p. 245.
CHAPTER II

1845-1865

As early as 1845 Kalamazoo citizens began to change both the physical appearance and the purpose of their central square. They moved the jail to stand alongside the courthouse, leaving what had been known as Jail Square a grassy field with the old Indian mound on one side. This empty square was the beginning of Kalamazoo's central park. Advancing this concept, the Highway Commission discontinued the portion of Church Street which ran between Jail and Academy Squares on 5 August 1847.¹ There is some discrepancy in dates but around 1849 the villagers surrounded the park with a fence of six inch boards.

Alexander J. Sheldon, marshal of Kalamazoo from 1849 to 1850, proposed further changes for the park among his sweeping improvements for the whole village. Sheldon came to the village as a book merchant and remained long enough to embark on a broad program of civic improvements. Under his auspices Main Street and Kalamazoo Avenue were graded and culverts installed. At his own expense, Sheldon installed the first wooden sidewalk in front of the Episcopal Church to encourage similar enterprises. Sheldon was behind

the movement to install the town's first storm sewer from the park along Rose Street to Arcadia Creek. This energetic man also became the first chief engineer of the fire company and originated and promoted the building of Fireman's Hall.

A. J. Sheldon also took interest in the small, unkept pasture in the middle of town. He improved the area and sought to truly turn it into a park. On 4 July 1850 Sheldon opened the Indian mound. As with E. Lakin Brown and Cyrus Lovell's 1832 excavation, Sheldon did not find much. Before he closed the mound he left a sealed jar for the future in which Sheldon placed appropriate objects of early life in the village. "In the jar were a number of copper and silver coins, specimens of our wildcat currency, the latest village papers, and a short tabular account of the condition of the village, names of its officers, etc."³

On 25 April 1851, the Kalamazoo Gazette included a report by A. J. Sheldon which listed the improvements he had completed in the park.⁴ After this report the area ceased to be referred to as Jail Square and in public documents became known simply as "the Park."


³Ibid.

⁴Kalamazoo Gazette, 25 April 1851, p. 2.
Sheldon obviously had great pride in the area as he claimed it to be the "... handsomest and the only park in the State." Sheldon had the Park completely enclosed and the principle walks graded and graveled. These avenues were lined with a variety of forest trees with a triple row of maples and elms surrounding the entire six acres. Several citizens made donations for other trees, roses, and shrubbery. During this time J. C. Beach was appointed Keeper of the Park as Sheldon became concerned about vandalism and upkeep. Sheldon also proposed an ordinance to protect the Park. He estimated forty dollars a year for the cost of maintenance and saw to it that these expenses were provided by a "special contingent fund."6

Unfortunately for Kalamazoo, Sheldon left for Buffalo, New York in 1853. However, his influence and plans lingered on, and, in the following four years, three ordinances were drafted concerning the Park. On 20 July 1853, horses and mules were barred from running at large in the area.7 A fine of three dollars for each offending animal found in the Public Square was set down as ordinance 33 in 1854.8 Concern about the Park continued and in 1857 the trustees

5Ibid.
6Ibid.
7History Room Scrapbook: Manners and Customs. Vol. 2 [Clippings from the Kalamazoo Gazette, located in Local History Room, Kalamazoo Public Library], Kalamazoo Gazette, 8 February 1929.
8Kalamazoo, Michigan, Governing Body Minutes [Indexes and Journals found on microfilm in the Kalamazoo Public Library Reference Room], Journal 2, p. 250.
drafted ordinance 39, which also dealt with the preservation of the area.\footnote{Ibid., Journal 3, p. 85.}

The creation of this public park was not without certain complications and controversies. First came the question of just who owned the land now converted into the Park. As it had been a gift to the county, an inducement to locate the county seat in Bronson, the village of Kalamazoo had to lease the property from the county authorities for a period of ten years.\footnote{Kalamazoo Gazette, 18 October 1925, sec. 3, p. 14.} However, when the land had first been platted the square had been set aside for a county jail, and by 1854 it was no longer being used for this purpose. There was a certain merit to the claim of the reversion title which was entered by the Stephen Richardson heirs. "The deed had provided that the land would revert unless used for certain public purposes."\footnote{History Rook Scrapbook: Parks, vol. 4, Kalamazoo Gazette, 5 March 1936.} In later years historians assumed that Titus Bronson generously donated the park land to the community, but it must be noted that it was the Richardson heirs, not Bronson's heirs, to whom the title reverted. In any event, in 1856 the village sent Hezekiah G. Wells, prestigious local lawyer, to settle the dispute at which time he obtained a quit-claim deed from the Richardson heirs for $150. The park's continued existence was secured for the time being.
The same year Wells settled the ownership question, the citizens continued to improve the park. On 10 October, the trustees of the village received a petition signed by about 130 people requesting that the "Old Branch" be removed.

The undersigned citizens and residents of Kalamazoo believing the 'Park' in this village was designed for the use and benefit of the citizens, as also an ornament to our thriving village, would respectfully ask your honorable body to cause the building on the northeast corner of the public Park to be removed, the building being to a large majority of the citizens a wrong by its remaining there.

Kalamazoo, Oct. 10, 1856

However much the removal of the Academy might have been the wish of the majority, the city had no legal claim to the land as long as it was used for the purposes for which it was originally donated. It was likely that the title would become permanent after twenty years of occupation, so just before that time was up, the village trustees gave notice to Dr. Stone that the area must be vacated, a request which he totally ignored. Yet the citizens themselves soon took matters into their own hands when one night the entire building, pianos and all, was shifted off the Park to the center of the street. There it remained for weeks, blocking traffic while the controversy raged over what to do with it. Finally the trustees decided to move the structure to Willard Street where it was used in the public school system. Thus the public now had 3.6 acres to their central Park.

12Kalamazoo Gazette, 10 October 1856, p. 3.

13History of Kalamazoo, 1880, p. 142.
The citizens witnessed a more grim scene in 1856 when the Democrats installed a memorial cannon. It was beautifully inscribed with the words "Purchased by Democrats, Kalamazoo campaign, 1856." These politically minded gentlemen obtained their cannon in July, but it was not fired until 5 September of that year. To the horror of a celebrating crowd, the cannon's explosion killed one of the firemen, George Gunn, and blew off the hand of another, William Black. The "killer" cannon was soon removed from the Park and a citizen took it to Mendon. The cannon ultimately turned up in Rome City, Indiana where a relative of a Kalamazooan discovered it and returned it to the city in 1929 to sit on the municipal building lawn, facing Bronson Park.

The villagers long remembered the wild 1856 campaign. In the summer months political groups organized huge mass conventions all over Michigan. The newly formed Republican Party, running candidate John C. Fremont, came first in Kalamazoo. H. G. Wells organized the rally using the Park as the center. He invited many speakers for the 27th of August, among whom was the slightly known politician from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln. The rally lasted all day and into the evening with food brought in from local farms and at least four speaker's stands built for the occasion. Estimates of the crowd were as low as 5,000 and as high as 35,000. Local tradition has

14Kalamazoo Gazette, 16 June 1929, p. 29.

Lincoln delivering his speech from the Indian mound, where other famous speakers stood in later years. Lincoln did not make much of an impression on his audience. He was considered a secondary attraction, and he angered many by his moderate approach to the slavery issue. Yet his speech in Kalamazoo did foreshadow his great oration known as the "House Divided" speech. "However, the speech was costly to Lincoln. His moderate sentiments absolutely infuriated 'Zach' Chandler: from that day forward, the fire-eating abolitionist was Lincoln's bitter enemy."17

The Democrats also held their mass convention in 1856 at the Park. James Buchanan's vice presidential running mate, John C. Breckinridge, spoke in the afternoon. Senator Cass of Detroit and Daniel S. Dickinson of New York also gave speeches on the big day. The Democrats served Breckinridge and one hundred Kalamazoo men a huge banquet across from the Park at the home of Nathaniel A. Balch. Apparently a public barbecue was held in the Park itself, followed by a reception at Charles E. Stuart's home.18

Thus the citizens were changing the purpose of the Park, making it a community center as well as the focus of key buildings around it. The lots fronting the Park were becoming some of the

16Ibid., p. 25.
17Ibid.
18History Room Scrapbook: Parks, vol. 1, Kalamazoo Gazette, 29 May 1929.
most prestigious in the village. In the 1850s the old Justus Burdick mansion on Main Street was moved when the estate was divided into business lots. The new location faced Rose Street, directly across from the Park, where after several owners, it became the "St. Nicholas Boarding House."  

Some of Kalamazoo's most distinguished early citizens built their homes facing Bronson Park. D. A. McNair owned a drugstore on the corner of Main Street and Burdick Street. He lived at the corner of South Street and Rose Street until a financial failure wiped him out in 1859. Nathaniel A. Balch came to Kalamazoo in 1837 in connection with Kalamazoo College. By 1849 he was studying law with Charles Stuart and for two years, 1841-1842, served as prosecuting attorney for Kalamazoo County. Balch became a state senator and later a postmaster for Kalamazoo under Buchanan. Balch also served for twenty-five years as the President of the Kalamazoo Bar Association, and for a time as the President of the Village of Kalamazoo.

Both Frederick Bush and Thomas Paterson of the Bush and Paterson Construction Company shared a house on the south side of the

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Park. Their pioneer firm was "concerned in much of the building in the early history of the place, furnished an impressive illustration of the value of harmony as well as enterprise in business."21 Their thirty-six year partnership began in 1856, and their first cash job was the building of the original fair buildings. In 1869 the firm built the county jail and remodeled the old courthouse. The Academy of Music, originally owned by a stock company, was bought by Bush and Paterson, and run by Bush's son Benjamin. Active in many areas of the village, Bush was also a promoter and president of the Kalamazoo and Saginaw Railroad, a stockholder in the Michigan National Bank and a village trustee.

Luther H. Trask came to Kalamazoo originally as a surveyor and civil engineer in 1835. He built a number of stores and homes including his own which faced the Park and had the distinction of being the first brick house in the village. In 1836 Trask was one of the stock company formed to build the First Presbyterian Church. Trask became a clerk of the circuit court of Kalamazoo in 1839, a receiver of the United States Land Office in 1842, an inspector of the State Prison in 1858, and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Michigan Insane Asylum from 1858 to 1878.22 Before his death in


22Ibid., p. 292.
1888, Trask found time to be one of the founders and members of the executive board of the Michigan Female Seminary.

The Honorable Frederick W. Curtenius must surely belong on this list of distinguished men who lived on the edge of the Park. Curtenius raised a Kalamazoo company of infantry to fight in the Mexican War, and another Michigan Volunteer Regiment for the Civil War. After refusing to return runaway slaves, Curtenius was arrested and reprimanded by the United States Army. However, the State of Michigan upheld his position and Curtenius returned home to a hero's welcome. Voters elected him to the State Senate in 1856 and again in 1867. He also served for two years as the United States Collector of Internal Revenue. In local affairs, Curtenius held the office of Treasurer of the Michigan Asylum for the Insane and was elected President of the Kalamazoo City Bank in 1866.

Among the others who lived facing the Park in the 1860s was Samuel H. Ransom who resided in a fine dwelling built in 1844 on the corner of Park Street and Academy Street. Ransom engaged in the purchase, sale, and exchange of real estate, owned a bakery, a meat market, and a sawmill. He also was one of the originators of Kalamazoo College and a member of the building committee. Josiah Hawes, distinguished attorney-at-law and circuit court judge, lived just down the street. Joel J. Perrin's home was next to the Balch residence on South Street. Joel Perrin, Oliver C. Perrin, and Lewis Perrin conducted a business which dealt with hardware, stoves, tinware, leather belting, iron, nails, wagon and carriage stock.
Again in 1860, as in 1856, the Democrats organized an enormous political rally in the Park. This time Stephen A. Douglas arrived to campaign in Kalamazoo for his concept of "Popular Sovereignty." Storm clouds had been gathering over the nation for the past decade, and with the 1860 split of the Northern and Southern Democrats, the political parties polarized into sectional factions. The Civil War was not far off, but for the moment Kalamazoo turned out in force with Douglas' close friend, Charles E. Stuart, to welcome the Northern Democratic candidate. Stuart was president of the day and he organized the crowd of an estimated 30,000 people in the Park. Douglas' train arrived at 1:30. He was met by Stuart and a great mass of people with banners and flags who escorted his carriage to Stuart's home. The crowd then reassembled at the Park, a full two hours before the speaking commenced. The 19 October Kalamazoo Gazette reported that the two and one-half acres of ground was covered with a dense mass of men and women. So many people crowded in that there was some trouble making a passage to get Douglas to the speaker's stand.

During the war years, the village completed various improvements in the Park. In the spring of 1862 the village trustees contracted with Bush and Paterson for a new fence around the land. By 1864 the trustees had removed the rather ragged old fence, leveled

23Kalamazoo Gazette, 19 October 1860, p. 2.
bumps and planted more trees.\textsuperscript{24} That same year the trustees made a full commitment to the future of the Park when they signed a ninety-nine-year lease for it from the county.

Although church buildings remained on the same site around the Park, they sometimes changed hands during this period. In 1850 the first of many Dutch immigrants settled in Kalamazoo and organized the Reformed Church which held services in Dutch. Originally the congregation purchased the lot and frame church belonging to the Congregationalists on South Street. In 1856, the Reformed Church moved again, this time acquiring the land of the Methodists on the southeast corner of Church Square, facing the Park. The building itself was sold and removed in 1870 and a large frame church was built at once on the same site at the cost of about $13,000.\textsuperscript{25}

The \textit{Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph} of 23 July 1868 carried an editorial by a concerned citizen about the improvement in the Park as it stood, but the fact that he cared enough to write about it illustrates his pride and concern:

\begin{quote}
When the new jail's improving walls are reared, it [the Park] will be surrounded by fine houses on every side, close by the business streets, and yet in the heart of the best residential part of the town. There are a great many who ought to take pride in 'our park.'
\end{quote}

This citizen had a vision of the park as:

\begin{quote}
... a beautiful public garden, with its fountains, arbors, parterres of flowers, thickets and quiet nooks—a delightful
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24}Kik Report, 1963, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{25}Willis Dunbar, \textit{Kalamazoo and How It Grew} (Faculty Contributions, Western Michigan University, 1959), p. 74.
place, these evenings—a place where one could get a cool breath, meet one's friends, hear some good music, and perhaps, freshen up and lay aside a hard work-day life for an hour.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26}Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, 23 July 1868, p. 4.
CHAPTER III

1866-1880

In the years before the Civil War, the citizens created the Park and improved it in numerous ways. Churches and grand Italianate homes lined the streets bordering the area. But basically the Park remained a shady, green, fenced rectangle. The simplicity that inspired Sheldon and the villagers of 1850 had less appeal to the tastes of 1880. The decade around the nation's centennial celebration brought an increased formality which continued through the turn of the century.

Ex-Mayor Dwight May, in the Annual Report of the Village of Kalamazoo for 1875 stated that "our park has been too long neglected." He suggested that the Park required immediate attention, and that only a small outlay of money would transform an "unsightly spot" into a true park. By the next year a standing committee was appointed under the title of Parks and Public Grounds. This committee became instrumental in developing the Park, yet through the next year no big projects were started. The committee explained this seeming lack of industry in the 1877 Annual Report.3

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1Annual Report of the Village of Kalamazoo (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1875), p. 17.
3Ibid., 1877, p. 5.
They would have liked to have started some permanent improvements on the Park, but owing to the hard times and the inability of some citizens to pay their taxes, the Parks and Public Grounds committee was limited.

The year 1876 was an exciting year for Kalamazoo as it was for the whole nation. The centennial celebrations were big and enthusiastic. In Kalamazoo, as in earlier years, the citizens used the public square as the center of the event. The special supplement to the weekly *Kalamazoo Gazette* gave a program for the events. Exercises commenced at the Park at 12:00, after a grand march, with music provided by a one-hundred voice choir and various bands. Germain H. Mason was to read the Declaration of Independence, Asa Stoddard a poem, and Reverend Spencer a concluding prayer and benediction. However, most other accounts, including a later *Gazette* report, state that the Centennial Celebration of 1876 took place, not in the park proper, but "at the grand stand, which was erected on the west side of the courthouse, under the noble trees that grace the square...." Yet most probably the crowd that gathered for the festivities flowed over into and around the Park. In fact, in the address, a brief history of the Park and Courthouse Square was read to the village.5

Once more the Park became a focal point of civic interest. A

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4 *History of Kalamazoo*, 1880, p. 236.
5 *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 7 July 1876, p. 1.
group of twenty-six citizens looked to their own past and felt the need to pay a debt to the pioneer who first settled Kalamazoo—Titus Bronson. At the 4 December meeting of the Village Trustees, Delos Phillips, Dwight May and others presented a petition dealing with the formal naming of the Park:

The undersigned residents and property owners in this village respectfully represent that whereas by the munificence of Titus Bronson, the first settler on this soil and the founder of this village, the beauty in which we rejoice and which distinguishes Kalamazoo, is largely due to his gift of ground for public purposes; and that this village by public act has never in any way recognized his generosity and taste. Therefore we pray your honorable body to confer by the village ordinance the name of Bronson Park upon what is now known as the Park in this village.  

Apparently the petition was well received for an ordinance was recorded, passed, and filed on that same night.  

The villagers envisioned plans for their newly named park. The underlying discontent with its undeveloped simplicity finally surfaced in 1877. The trustees first sent H. G. Wells to the State Capital to make sure everything was in order before permanent improvements were planned. In July Wells sent a communication to the Village Board in which he told about the documents he searched pertaining to Bronson Park. He reported that the title grant of the park resting in Kalamazoo County was absolute so long as it was used

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6Kalamazoo, Michigan, Loose Papers of the Governing Body of Kalamazoo [Indexed in the City Clerk's Office, Kalamazoo, Michigan], Master Index no. 416.

7Governing Body Minutes, Journal 5, p. 523.

8Loose Papers, Master Index no. 15279.
for ornamental grounds and park purposes. Wells also checked on the ninety-nine year lease of the park. He concluded that all was in order and that Kalamazoo Village had ample power to beautify the park. By September the Village Board asked landscape gardener Adam Oliver about a plan for improving Bronson Park.9

The Committee on Parks and Public Grounds noted that by 1878 none of the needed improvements had been implemented.10 The fence looked dilapidated and the walks caused much complaint. The committee recommended that the park be graded, the east end filled in at least eighteen inches and the west side covered one inch to correct the drainage problems. The committee also wanted a fence of five by five inch white oak posts placed ten feet apart with iron cable chain connecting. Further improvements might include a fountain in the center and securely fastened iron seats for fifty persons. These recommendations remained dreams as the village spent only $20.20 for raking leaves and grass. But the Adam Oliver plans were taking shape for the next year.11 A dynamic new chairman of the Parks and Public Grounds Committee, George F. Kidder, took charge, and the changes began.

The Parks and Public Grounds Committee summarized the work which began in 1879 in the Annual Report of the Village.12 They

9Kalamazoo Gazette, 7 September 1877, p. 1.
10Village Annual Report, 1878, p. 3.
12Village Annual Report, 1879, p. 5.
indicated the amount of money expended and mentioned some of the jobs yet to be completed. Adam Oliver prepared a master plan and staked out the land ready for work. Wells were sunk down to the sand in a number of places, then filled with stone. Workmen excavated the walks to an average depth of three and one-half feet and filled them with sand for the purpose of drainage. Low places in the park were filled and the whole surface seeded. Two new tulip trees, donated by Oliver C. Hill, shaded the area in front of L. H. Trask's home and the Amariah T. Prouty residence. The water and gas lines added at this time proved to be of long range value. Probably the biggest change incorporated in the Oliver plan lay in the building of a central fountain. The cement basin remained unfinished until the next year, along with gas lamp posts and two drinking fountains.

Private subscription paid for many of the improvements in Bronson Park, amply demonstrating the civic pride and interest in the area. The Village collected $510 on subscription for ornamentation. With an expenditure of $85.20 on cement, $116.25 on labor and $216.09 on stone, the fountain cost $467.57.\(^{13}\) In total the Village Board spent $2724.56 on the park and the fountain.

In 1880 these improvements continued, and the park reflected the more formal taste of the citizens. At the monthly meeting of the Common Council, surveyor Francis Hodgeman was requested to look into connecting a sewer from the fountain basin to the Church Street

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}\)
A quantity of stone was drawn upon the grounds to fill in the basin to a depth of twenty-four inches. The fountain cost more than the villagers planned, with the necessary improvements and repairs, but they were convinced "that the bottom of our basin is firm as a rock and will be good for all time."\(^1\)

Many citizens lodged complaints about the unsafe and unsightly condition of the sidewalks around the park. The Common Council proposed to build a walk on the south and east end and took bids for alternative materials. Deciding against gravel, sandstone, or plank walks, the council settled on cement as the most durable and practical medium. John DeSmit, the lowest bidder, received the contract for $760.

The Committee on Parks and Public Grounds reported in the 1880 Annual Report about more of the miscellaneous money spent on Bronson Park in improvements that year.\(^2\) Lamps, drinking fountains, and coping cost $361.42; the fence and setting, $200.00; the trees in and around the park, $28.60. The village also expended $24.94 on a lawnmower and hose; $5.23 on grass seed; $58.50 on iron seats; and $190.70 on labor, bringing the whole to a total of $1471.77. Although expensive, the Committee on Parks and Public Grounds saw "no reason to regret the adoption of the plan by Oliver."\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Kalamazoo Gazette, 11 June 1880, p. 1.

\(^2\)Ibid., 9 July 1880, p. 1.

\(^3\)Village Annual Report, 1880, p. 9.

\(^4\)Ibid.
In fact, the plan and execution of improvements was so successful that Village Trustees amended certain sections of Ordinance Eleven to further protect Bronson Park. Section Seven made it unlawful to ride or drive over any part of the park, Section Eight forbade throwing any matter, substance, etc. into the basin of the fountain or within the surrounding fence. One has to wonder about the motivation for Section Nine which made it unlawful to bring or coax any animal into the fence around the fountain. The village obviously felt strongly enough about Bronson Park to want to protect it with laws, even to the degree of setting up a fine system for each infraction.

The days of barbecues and wild speech-making rallies were gone. The park was now a more formal, enclosed and stately place. Although the purpose changed, the park remained a modified center of celebration. On Decoration Day of 1880, a march began at Corporation Hall and followed a typical pattern that took in the "principal streets." Such a parade, although outside the park, tended to focus on it as the line snaked around the edges: from Corporation Hall, the parade advanced south on Burdick Street to Cedar Street where it turned west to Park Street. After turning north on Park Street, the crowd marched to South Street, turned east to Rose Street and then headed up to Court House Square following the lines of Bronson Park.18 After a program of patriotic speeches and songs, the mass split into two groups, one headed to Mountain Home Cemetery

18Kalamazoo Gazette, 4 June 1880, p. 1.
and the other to Riverside Cemetery to decorate the soldiers' graves.

The same type of celebration with a splendid parade around the park, ending at the courthouse for speeches, marked the July 4th celebrations of that year. When honored visitors came to the village, their hosts made a special point about showing off the "places of interest." Often the top choice on this list was the park, displayed with pride. For example, when 450 people from Grand Haven, Muskegon, Holland and Allegan came to Kalamazoo for a workingmen's society excursion party, a similar local group marched with them through the principle streets and by the park.19

Many of the original householders around Bronson Park remained, men like Balch, Perrin, Bush, Trowbridge, Ransom, Curtenius, and Trask. By 1880 a few more grand homes made this area more and more fashionable. Amariah T. Prouty came to Bronson in 1835 and lived in various places in the village throughout the years. The 1873 City Directory placed him at 12 S. Park Street. Prouty worked as a cabinetmaker, and he also took "an active role in Whig Politics, held several local offices, took a prominent part in Congregational Church affairs and found time to write on scientific agriculture."20

Joseph B. Cornell built a house on Rose Street, facing

19Ibid., 23 July 1880, p. 5.

Bronson Park, where his widow resided for many years after he died. J. B. Cornell and Company manufactured "first class carriages, buggies and sleighs." Lawrence and Chapin ironworks was one of the two largest employers in the village, and one of the largest foundries in Michigan. William S. Lawrence purchased land on South Street, across from Bronson Park and built the first of the two houses he was to live in on that site.

But perhaps the most notable member of this residential elite was Hezekiah Wells, who has already been mentioned as a prominent attorney. In 1850 Wells served in the Constitutional Convention of Michigan. After he moved to Kalamazoo he was elected four different years as President of the Village Board of Trustees and twice as one of the presidential electors of the State of Michigan. Wells also devoted time to the State Board of Agriculture, the Michigan Female Seminary and the Michigan State Pioneer Society. During the Civil War, Wells raised an infantry regiment and at the end of the war gained national fame as presiding judge of the "Court of Commissioners of Alabama Claims."22

21 Ibid., p. 70.

22 History of Kalamazoo, 1880, p. 217.
CHAPTER IV

1881-1890

During the 1880s work continued in Bronson Park with the trustees facing big drainage and sidewalk problems. Usage of the park was growing and the maintenance upkeep increased accordingly. In the 1870s the citizens seemed to have been reserved in their treatment of the park, but increasingly in the 1880s Bronson Park again had the huge celebrations as in the early years.

The first of the problems the trustees faced was stagnant water in the fountain. This they rectified by connecting the fountain basin to the sewer on Church Street.¹ Next, the Committee on Parks and Public Grounds authorized the trimming of the large shade trees so the light from street lamps might not be blocked.

The sidewalks around Bronson Park occupied much of the committee's time. In 1883 the cement walk was laid on the west end and the sidewalk along Academy Street was completed in 1889. But the problem of the dilapidated sidewalks on the south and east sides dragged on for years. The cement walks John DeSmit built in 1882 were soon found to be defective.

In September of 1883, DeSmit was accused of laying faulty cement.

¹Village Annual Report, 1881, p. 15.
cement. The committee resolved the controversy eight years later when it was finally discovered that the fault was actually due to the city spreading salt on the sidewalk. The city then refunded $100 to DeSmit as he had had to pay for the alleged damages.

Another recurring problem throughout the decade had to do with the drainage of the lower parts of Bronson Park. Some steps to correct this had been undertaken in the past, but without too much success. In 1881, the Village Board received a petition from N. A. Balch and thirty-eight others requesting that something be done about the standing water. The board requested a report on the matter and ordered plans to be drawn up to correct the problem. This all sounds very orderly, but, in fact, it took nearly four years to get to this stage. Finally in 1886, the drainage project for the north side was completed. In the Kalamazoo Annual Report for 1887 the Committee on Parks and Public Grounds recommended a drainage system for the corners and edges of the park. Thomas Doran received the drainage contract for $94.55 which was completed in 1888.

By 1885, Bronson Park became such a popular spot the Village

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3 Loose Papers, Master Index no. 10492.
Board found it necessary to hire a park keeper, originally appointed at a salary of thirty dollars per month.\(^7\) The next year Albert H. Freeman acquired the job at a salary of forty dollars. Freeman retained the position for the summer only, so each year, 1885–1888, he was reappointed. Apparently his work remained satisfactory for by 1888 his salary reached forty-five dollars a month.\(^8\)

Throughout the decade the board implemented various improvements and refurbishings. The 1884 *Kalamazoo Annual Report* records $77.50 spent on park seats and painting. The next year the board built fences to protect the grass; renewed, painted, and secured the lawn seats; and painted and repaired the gas and water fixtures. In 1886 the Committee on Parks and Public Grounds recommended that certain decayed trees be removed and more flowers and shrubs set out.\(^9\) Toward the end of the 1880s came the first of the petitions requesting some permanent band stand or band shell to be erected.\(^{10}\)

The 25 September 1883 *Kalamazoo Gazette* gave a complete and entertaining description of a fountain designed by Dr. Charles W. Ayer. He designed this effusive creation for Bronson Park and donated his plans to Kalamazoo.

According to the *Gazette*:

\(^7\)Ibid. Journal 7, p. 593.

\(^8\)Ibid. Journal 9, p. 165.

\(^9\)City Annual Report, 1886, p. 57.

\(^{10}\)Loose Papers, Master Index no. 990.
The fountain was to be made of marble, the lower basin being rimmed and having four or six nickel rocket-shaped jets. There will be a second basin similar to the first . . . the second basin will, apparently be sustained, in part, by four dragon's heads from the nostrils of which will pour clouds of spray.

Arising from the second basin is to be another column of lesser height, resting on the top of which will be an ornamental urn, from which a water lily will extend.

On the edge of the urn will stand four cupids . . . two blowing trumpets and two harnessed in bluebells with one bell in each hand.

Standing in the lily will be three goddesses, representing the summer months mantled in flowers, and wearing wreaths on their heads, from which will extend bridal veils formed of spray.11

The Kalamazoo Gazette was glowing in its praise of this fountain design. Although it was never constructed, the voluptuous style reflected the taste of the time and the vision some citizens had of Bronson Park. This "formal garden" appearance was cultivated in the following decade.

It is perhaps, paradoxical that with all the efforts to formalize Bronson Park that the citizens would once more hold large gatherings there. On Decoration Day in 1881, the people formed a large parade, as was the custom for the time, marched around the park and finally headed north on Rose Street to Court House Square for the speeches, yet by 1884 the older tradition of holding the 4 July celebrations inside the park revived. After the procession through the streets, the people gathered in the park to hear the

11Alexis A. Praus, Historical Markers and Memorials in Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo County (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo Historical Commission, 1969), [p. 20].
historical address and the oration. Following this the citizens laid the cornerstone for the new courthouse building. Citizens were eager to use their beautiful, refurbished park, as earlier that same year memorial services were held for those who fell in the Rebellion. The grand column formed on Portage Street, then marched around the city ending at Bronson Park. The program conducted by Reverend Theodore Nelson, was delivered from a platform built upon the Indian mound.\textsuperscript{12} The next year the city held a very special gathering in Bronson Park which reflected the death-conscious taste of the period. On 8 August citizen groups built great black and white arches at each park entrance in preparation for memorial services for ex-President Ulysses S. Grant. The same groups likewise shrouded lampposts, a number of trees, and the speaker's stand in keeping with the sombre mood.

As the park changed over the years, so too did the land facing it. In 1881 Frederick Bush contracted for an opera building, designed by the firm of Adler and Sullivan, called the Academy of Music. This was the first public building that was not in Titus Bronson's original plan for the area; and it marked the beginning of the change from residential to commercial use. The theatre contained cherry paneling, plate glass mirrors, plush carpets and specially designed opera chairs for twelve hundred patrons.\textsuperscript{13} To make way for the Academy of Music, Peyton Ranney bought the old

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 6 June 1884, p. 7.

St. Nicholas Boarding House, originally Justus Burdick's home, and had it removed to the corner of Vine Street and West Street. Apparently this move created quite a stir in town as local movers put the building on rollers and took a full twenty days to inch down Rose Street. Eventually the house had to be sawed in half before it could complete the journey.\footnote{Ibid., p. 151-152.}

In 1884, fire gutted the old Presbyterian Church on the northeast corner of Rose Street and South Street.\footnote{Dunbar, Kalamazoo and How It Grew, p. 113.} Shortly after, the congregation raised the money to build a new church on the same site. The new church was constructed of red brick with Berea sandstone trimmings. It fronted eighty-four feet on Rose Street and included an auditorium and a chapel.

Two newcomers settled on South Street facing the park according to the 1885-1886 city directory. Clothier, George W. Taylor, built between Josiah Hawes and the Samuel H. Ransom residence, then occupied by Ira A. Ransom. James Sebring, operator of a grain elevator, built his house further south on Park Street by the corner.
In the decade just before the turn of the century, Bronson Park came even closer to resembling a formal European garden. The park keeper now held a permanent position and in 1892 his salary rose to fifty dollars a month.¹

For most of the decade William Oliver served as "gardener of the park." The Committee on Parks and Public Grounds frequently commented on Oliver's exemplary supervision, reporting in 1896 that "William Oliver . . . ably satisfied his past reputation . . . he has labored under serious difficulties arising from the destruction of a number of decorations in Bronson Park."²

The garden-like aspect of Bronson Park was enhanced by flowers in large vases placed throughout in 1890. Oliver planted elaborate flower beds and added more vases the following year. The Board of Trustees authorized the purchase of twenty-five more lawn seats and the introduction of hardier plants and bulbs. By 1892 the Committee on Parks and Public Grounds narrowed the width of the heavily used walks and added new gravel. Two years later the Kalamazoo Gas

¹Governing Body Minutes, Journal 10, p. 72.
²City Annual Report, 1896, p. 58.
Light Company petitioned for permission to set gas lamps in and around the park. In 1897 a new greenhouse at Riverside Cemetery gave park keeper William Oliver the facilities for creating even more elaborate flowerbeds in Bronson Park.

As the citizens decorated Bronson Park, they also used it more frequently. A. Gruce, capitalizing on the increased crowds, petitioned the trustees for permission to establish a popcorn stand on the northeast corner of Bronson Park. The Committee on Parks and Public Grounds, in 1899, described Bronson Park as becoming more and more a place of resort in the summer evenings. They recommended that two or more lights be added, one at each end.

Over the years various temporary speakers' platforms had been built in the park, but now the people wanted one for common use. Sixty-nine citizens petitioned for just such a permanent pavilion in 1899. The Council apparently recognized the need for it and granted the request allocating not more than $300 for the purpose. The Committee on Parks and Public Groups likewise recommended that a permanent stand or pavilion be constructed for public gatherings. By

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3Loose Papers, Master Index no. 1135.
4City Annual Report, 1897, p. 55.
5Loose Papers, Master Index no. 1209.
6City Annual Report, 1899, p. 59.
7Loose Papers, Master Index no. 1536.
8City Annual Report, 1899, p. 59.
1900 the city built a pavilion for $450.

Commemorative monuments first appeared in Bronson Park in the 1890s. Although nothing came of the early recommendations, as early as 1891 the Kalamazoo Annual Report mentions the possibility of a monument to soldiers and sailors. In 1896 a member of the Orcutt Post of the G.A.R. made a request to place a monument in the park. The spokesman explained to the Council that he could secure a cannon from the War Department for such a use.

In 1898 a more permanent bronze marker mounted on a boulder, was dedicated in the approximate center of the south half of Bronson Park. The following text was inscribed upon it:

In memoriam U.S.S. Maine destroyed in Havana Harbor. February 15th 1898. This tablet is cast from metal recovered from the U.S.S. Maine Patriotism Devotion.

Bronson Park played a central role in the grand celebrations of the 1890s. Once again huge crowds packed into the park for the Fourth of July exercises in 1891. The Kalamazoo Gazette described a "rip-snorting, bomb-bursting, band playing, flag waving affair." The citizens attending apparently quieted enough to hear speeches by Senator Francis B. Stockbridge and ex-Governor Cyrus G. Luce and

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9City Annual Report, 1891, p. 53.

10Kalamazoo Gazette, 14 August 1896, p. 3.

11Alexis A. Praus, Historical Markers and Memorials in Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo County (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo Historical Commission, 1969), [p. 20].

12Kalamazoo Gazette, 4 July 1953, B-4.
Lawrence Burke read the Declaration of Independence. One can only wonder what the state of Oliver's flower beds must have been after such festivities.

Various groups throughout the decade petitioned the council for use of the park either for holidays or for special events. In 1893 the Knights of Maccabbee requested the use of the park for a Sunday meeting and in 1898 the Women's Christian Temperance Union petitioned for the area for the Fourth of July. The G.A.R. was granted the use of Bronson Park for Decoration Day in 1898. The same year a military group used the park for an exhibition drill and speakers on 4 October.\textsuperscript{13}

A whole series of Sunday School rallies occurred in and around the park from 1893 to 1898. The first was organized by the Kalamazoo County Sunday School Association for August of 1893. Due to the success of this first one, the association held two more the next year. These rallies grew with the passage of time and by 1895 petitioners requested the use of the public streets for a parade, as well as Bronson Park.\textsuperscript{14} The 1898 Sunday School rally encompassed the streets, the park and a reviewing stand at the northeast corner of Court House Square.

The labor organizations regularly used Bronson Park for Labor Day celebrations. In 1896 Labor Day fell on 7 September and the

\textsuperscript{13}Governing Body Minutes, Journal 13, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., Journal 11, p. 407.
Council granted the use of the park for speaking. The groups formed a "monster parade" and marched around the park before entering it for the morning festivities. After noon the labor organizations planned to move to Recreation Park for bicycle races and fireworks as space was limited in Bronson Park. According to the Kalamazoo Gazette "no more beautiful spot could have been provided or selected for the assemblage of the toilers of Kalamazoo than Bronson Park, where a vast multitude gathered after the parade." A suitable stand for the speakers had been built on the mound and decorated with flags and union banners.

National figures appeared in Bronson Park more often in the 1890s. Kalamazoo was in a good location for travelers; trains regularly ran through the city on the way to Detroit and Chicago, as well as to other parts of the state. The Kalamazoo Gazette reporters were impressed when William Jennings Bryan came to Kalamazoo while he was running against McKinley on 15 October 1896. Twenty plumed horsemen escorted Bryan from the train station to Bronson Park amidst the crowds. The Gazette estimated a total of between twenty and twenty-five thousand people gathered to hear the candidate speak. Bryan delivered his address from the Indian mound where so many speakers had stood on similar occasions.

Among the biggest local events were the Annual Street Fairs

16 Kalamazoo Gazette, 8 October 1950, p. 4.
which started in October 1899. The *Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph* added an entire "street fair edition" to cover the event each year. The fair usually lasted four days with special events, booths, displays and parades. Various downtown streets were cordoned off and a general pandemonium reigned. Thousands of people poured into Kalamazoo from outlaying regions via excursion trains and horseback. Naturally the entire affair could not be conducted in the two blocks of Bronson Park, but a variety of events were regularly scheduled there.

Perhaps the biggest of these glorious Street Fairs took place in 1899. President McKinley opened the celebration the first night and the whole town turned out. A huge parade of citizens wound around the park with fireworks set off along the way. Citizens' committees decorated the entire route with electric lights, lamps, lanterns, headlights from locomotives and streetcars, searchlights and torches mounted on trees. The newspaper instructed people in the art of igniting bags of "colored fire" in shallow tin dishes filled with sand.

Another affair of local excitement occurred when the city welcomed General Shafter home with a Peace Jubilee at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. Once again a "monster parade" ended at the mound in Bronson Park. The occasion was climaxed by a speech from the General in which he related his account of the ninety-day war in Cuba.

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The atmosphere created by the fine residences lining the streets around Bronson Park remained largely unchanged. Most of the same families lived in their original homes. In the early 1880s the Academy of Music appeared; by 1893 a second public building was added on Rose Street. Dr. and Mrs. Edwin H. Van Deusen made a gift of funds for a new Kalamazoo Public Library to be located on the old Howard property on the corner of South Street and Rose Street.19 Van Deusen had come to Kalamazoo in 1858 as the first medical superintendent of the Kalamazoo Asylum for the Insane. His only stipulation was that a room be set aside for the use of the Academy of Medicine which it occupied for many years. Thus the Bronson Park area was very subtly shifting away from the more residential mood.

19Ibid., p. 104.
CHAPTER VI

1901-1920

After the turn of the century Bronson Park declined. Citizen's groups no longer held "monster" celebrations in the park. The people turned elsewhere for much of their recreation, to places with more space and more elaborate facilities. Improved street cars and, by the 1920s, the automobile, made people more mobile. Bronson Park mirrored that change. Although there were some improvements throughout the two decades, the citizens were less concerned and often simple maintenance was postponed for a year or two. Kalamazoo's park acreage was growing but the allocated budget lagged behind. By 1917 the entire Parks budget was $4,000, yet the city owned 92.62 acres of parks including Milham and Crane Parks.¹

From 1902 to 1910 there was no specific mention of Bronson Park at all in the City Annual Reports. However, it would be a mistake to assume that nothing at all happened in those years. In 1903 the Officers of Kalamazoo City accepted bids for painting in the park, so at least some maintenance was getting done.² The pavilion was removed by 1908 and the next year the G.A.R. planted trees; the city purchased a number of benches, and a group of citizens donated

²Loose Papers, Master Index no. 7994.
fish for the pool.³

By the second decade of the twentieth century, at least some people became concerned with the decaying aspect of Bronson Park. Park superintendent Thomas Kennett recommended that good walks were needed in the park, the fountain required changes, and the grass needed fertilizer.⁴ In 1911 the city did get around to repairing the pool and the fountain, but for two years after that the city only provided basic maintenance services, while the Parks Committee annually requested a higher budget. The committee was able to give Bronson Park ad hoc improvements; in 1915 two drinking fountains and improved lawns, and in 1920, $207.60 was spent on cement pipe for the fountain, fish, fish food, flags, painting of the flag pole, and cartage of gravel and weeds. Except for those years, the city did little to even maintain the park. Apparently the park was still frequently used, as in 1916 the Annual Report recommended that the "much used" walks in Bronson Park be laid in asphalt as the old gravel walks were so hazardous that the public generally walked on the grass instead.⁵ Yet, these problems remained unsolved for another twenty years.

The trend to place memorial markers in Bronson Park, which had started just before the turn of the century, became even more prevalent during this twenty year span. On 4 July 1907, the Lucinda

⁴City Annual Report, 1911, p. 138.
⁵Ibid., 1916, p. 161.
Hinsdale Stone Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a liberty pole "in memory of the pioneers and patriots of this country who by their deeds of heroism voiced the 'Spirit of Liberty.'" This flagpole was taken down sometime after 1931.

Two years later a granite marker was placed near the center of the east boundary of Bronson Park. The following words were inscribed upon it: Orcutt Post G.A.R. Tree, Apr. 30, 1909. Then on 15 August 1913 a second bronze marker was placed on the 1898 Maine Memorial boulder. Post Commander Gus L. Stein obtained the bronze tablet for the Richard Westnedge Camp number 16 of the United Spanish War Veterans and it was presented by Holland Simmons of Orcutt Post number 79 G.A.R. Later that same year the Eleventh Regiment of Michigan Volunteer Cavalry presented a bronze tablet to the city on the fiftieth anniversary of leaving for the front. The boulder with the tablet sat on the east edge of the park facing South Rose Street.

One final memorial was placed in Bronson Park during these two decades. It is fitting that the memorial to Lucinda H. Stone be placed near by where she taught for many years in the "Old Branch" building. The bronze marker on the boulder reads as follows:

To Lucinda Hinsdale Stone Educator, Organizer, Philanthropist, Friend of Woman. This tablet is placed in grateful memory, September 30, 1914. The centenary of her birth, by the daughters of the chapter, D.A.R. which bears her name.

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6Praus, Historical Markers, [p. 20].
7Ibid.
8Ibid.
While there were certainly fewer of the large scale festivities in the park, they did not cease altogether. Each of the memorials mentioned above had a dedication ceremony in the park. In 1901 memorial services for President McKinley had been planned for Bronson Park, but inclement weather forced the proceedings across the street to the Academy of Music.⁹ Citizens groups such as the D.A.R. and the Odd Fellows of Kalamazoo still held events here. Political groups used the park in 1908 for an address by Governor Warner in July. The 1909 "Silver Annie" celebration recognized the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kalamazoo being incorporated as a city. The activities and the mood recalled the street fairs of the 1890s, with at least some of the events slated for Bronson Park. A big Armistice Day celebration was held in the park in 1920, along with a series of band concerts throughout the summer.

There may have been few changes to Bronson Park at the beginning of the century, but the area around the park altered profoundly. Many of the older residents were dying, and their widows occupied the grand homes for a few years. Then one by one the homes began to be converted to other uses or replaced by new public buildings. George W. Taylor had lived in his house at 216 Park Street for many years. After his death the building was used by the American Red Cross in 1917, then it stood vacant. In 1904 Mrs. Hannah L. Cornell's home was the only residence left on South Rose Street facing the park. By 1915 the building was occupied by Goss Furniture

Company. That same year the Young Women's Christian Association purchased the site and started the first of the new units in 1918. The Y.W.C.A. building was not dedicated until 9 January 1924.10

Various people owned the large Balch home on the corner of Rose Street and South Street, but by 1904 it too passed out of residential use. Three older men's clubs—the Kalamazoo Club, the Academy Club, and the Cosmopolitan Club—joined forces and merged to become the Park Club in reference to its new location, across the street from Bronson Park. The original goals of the organization were to promote social intercourse and to advance the interests of the city.

George W. Taylor, Benjamin A. Balch, James L. Sebring, Frank H. Milham, and Ira Ransom who all lived around the park, served as club officers at one time. In 1926 the Park Club expanded, and relocated next door in the William S. Lawrence home built in 1889. Like the Balch home, the Lawrence residence passed through a number of hands before being purchased by the Daughters of Rebekah, a unit of the Odd Fellows Lodge, and then the Park Club.

In 1902 the old James L. Hawes property on the corner of Park and South Streets was purchased by the twenty-four members of the First Church of Christ which had existed since 1893. The small congregation remodeled the residence. This was found to be inadequate, and ten years later the church body voted to build a new church. In October of 1913 the members saw to the laying of the cornerstone of

the present church building. Thus one more church was added to those that lined the streets facing the park.

Not all the old houses by Bronson Park left private hands. James L. Sebring still owned his residence on the southwest corner of South Street and Park Street. In fact, Sebring updated his property to include "a driveway around two sides of his house . . . [a] garage built with doors in both ends. The car was driven in from South Street through one set of doors, and departed through doors leading to Park Street."¹¹ The Ransoms also retained their Park Street home through this period. Ira Ransom, like Sebring, installed a handy device for his car. A turntable constructed in his garage/stable enabled Ransom to turn the entire car around so it would be heading out toward the street again.¹² Benjamin Bush continued to live on South Street until 1919 and the old Wells home remained a private residence. Arthur Pratt, who at one point owned the Odd Fellows Lodge, was the president of the King Paper Company, the owner of the Pratt Block, and a director of the First National Bank.¹³ William Wagner, 321 South Street, was a harnessmaker and a stockholder of the Central Bank.¹⁴ Ira A. Ransom had a long list of credits to his name. He became president and general manager of the Kalamazoo Gas Company, and president of the American Playing Card Company. He assisted in organizing other companies, such as the

¹¹Ibid., p. 120. ¹²Ibid.
¹³Fisher and Little, ed., Compendium of Biography, p. 245.
¹⁴Ibid., p. 186.
Kalamazoo Corset Company and the Comstock Manufacturing Company. Ransom was a director of the Upjohn Pill and Granule Company, the L. D. Cooley Harness Company and the Phelps and Bigelow Windmill Company, besides having a large share in the founding of the Iola (Kansas) Cement Company.¹⁵

Frank H. Milham, a newcomer to the park area helped organize the Bryant Paper Company, and served there as secretary and manager in 1895. He became secretary and director of the Superior Paper Company and the Munissing Paper Company. Milham also found time to serve as president of the Imperial Coating Company, the Illinois Envelope Company of Kalamazoo, and as director of the Home Savings Bank of Kalamazoo.¹⁶ Frank Milham had the unparalleled distinction of being nominated for Mayor by both parties in the same year and accepting neither. In community life, Milham served three years as president of the village of Otsego, a member of the Kalamazoo Board of Education, and a director and member of the building committee of the Kalamazoo Hospital.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., p. 505.
¹⁷Ibid.
CHAPTER VII

1921-1940

Between 1920 and 1940, Bronson Park underwent a period of sweeping changes. The area went through a renaissance, a grand new refurbishing of the appearance and purpose. The change started with a renewed interest in Bronson Park and a concern about its decay. Even in its lowest ebb after the turn of the century, Bronson Park still was rather heavily used. The 1922 Annual Report indicated overuse during the summer which created a maintenance problem. The Park Committee recommended that asphalt walks with cement curbs would be easier to care for.¹ But the largest expense was still only the water bill for the fountain, with small amounts allotted for flags, fish food and new pipes.

Soon, however, the city government responded to the Park Committee's pleas and increased the budget. In 1924, $1075.97 was expended for curbs for walks in addition to the regular amount for maintenance.² A few years later the recurrent drainage problem was dealt with; the committee drained the park and filled in the east end to bring it up to grade. That same year, 1927, the city officers granted a petition to erect a bird feeding station in Bronson

¹City Annual Reports, 1922, p. 53.

²Ibid., 1924, p. 60.
During the next four years the Annual Reports list new cement curbing and walks, reseeding and filling the entire area, sodding the parkway around the park, and the hiring of nightmen who spent much time watering due to the hot dry weather and big crowds.

Fewer and fewer of the huge celebrations were held in Bronson Park, but it remained a central place to visit and to relax informally. In 1921 a series of band concerts, conducted in Bronson and various other city parks, proved to be a decided success. The 1925 Annual Report called "centrally-located" Bronson Park "a visiting place for hundreds of people each day." The Kalamazoo Lions Club produced a trail and tourist guide to the city in 1928. The Lions started their tour at Bronson Park.

As in previous years, citizens placed many of the city's monuments and memorials in Bronson Park. In 1923 came the first petition for what came to be known as the "Hiker" statue. The Kalamazoo government granted permission to relocate an 1898 boulder and marker to make room for this new monument. Theo Alice Ruggles Kitson designed the bronze statue of a Spanish American War figure and the city dedicated it in 1924. The memorial stands on the northeast corner of the park with the following inscription:

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3Loose Papers, vol. 25, folio 953.

4City Annual Report, 1925, p. 46.

5History Room Scrapbook: Parks no. 1, Kalamazoo Gazette, 27 February 1923.
1898-1902 Erected by the citizens of Kalamazoo City and County to commemorate the valor and patriotism of those who served in the war with Spain the Philippine insurrection and the China Relief Expedition. Dedicated May 30th, A.D. 1924, under the auspices of Richard Westnedge Camp No. 16, United Spanish War Veterans Department of Michigan.6

In 1934 the City Commission granted the Daughters of the Union Veterans permission to erect a G.A.R. memorial in Bronson Park.7 The marker was to commemorate where Lincoln spoke in 1856. The memorial would serve as a tribute to the Grand Army of the Republic as well as to Lincoln. The dedication ceremony took place in November; the program included representatives of the Orcutt post, the mayor, and city manager and the Douglass Community singers.

Certainly the largest, if not the longest lasting, of the Bronson Park memorials was the McColl Fountain. Upon his death in 1925, Duncan McColl bequeathed the sum of $4,000 to Kalamazoo to build an electric fountain in the park. Two other American cities had these electrically lighted and run fountains, but it was still a novel and exciting prospect. The city accepted the bequest on 14 September 1925 and organized a Bronson Park Committee for ornamental lights.8 The bids for work began the next year, after the details of the design were worked out by Earl E. Norman, director of Public Utilities. Enthusiasm in the city ran high, and the work was

6Präus, Historical Markers, [p. 19].

7History Room Scrapbook: Parks no. 4, Kalamazoo Gazette, 11 October 1934.

completed the next summer with the Byers Brothers Construction Company doing the concrete work involved.\(^9\) The *Kalamazoo Gazette* praised Bronson Park's newest beauty spot:

The new fountain operates automatically and produces all the colors of the rainbow in different combinations as 30 lights play upon the 329 sprays of water. The different colorings mirrored upon the water reflect an artistic display.\(^{10}\)

However enchanted the citizens were at night, their fountain proved to be a bit disillusioning by harsh daylight. Some likened the cement structure to an unfinished silo, so it must be said that the reaction to the McColl fountain was mixed at best.\(^{11}\)

Following the trend more public buildings lined the streets around Bronson Park. In 1924 the city purchased the Frank Milham house and lot on South Street for $58,000 with plans of locating a new city hall there.\(^{12}\) For the time being the city offices were housed in the old house which stood there. That same year the Y.W.C.A. completed and dedicated their Rose Street building thus emptying the street of private residences.

One of the great mysteries of the 1920s was the series of fires which destroyed a number of the downtown churches. In 1925 the First Congregational Church burned, in 1926 the First Methodist and the First Presbyterian Churches followed. Within three years

\(^9\)City Annual Report, 1926, p. 2.

\(^{10}\)History Room Scrapbook: Parks no. 1, *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 2 July 1927.

\(^{11}\)Kik Report, 1963, p. 2.

each congregation had rebuilt their houses of worship. The Congregationalists retained the same site on the southwest corner of Church Square. A few years earlier the First Presbyterian had acquired a lot on the corner of South Street and what had been renamed St. John's Place, the location of the old Bush home. So it was here they built their new church. The corner lot thus vacated by the First Presbyterians became first a used car lot owned by Otis H. Boylan, then later a parking lot. The Methodists also relocated after the fire. They selected the land on the corner of Park Street and Academy Street thereby bringing the total number of churches facing Bronson Park to five.

Four professional actors, Mrs. Norman Carver, Howard Chenery, Arthur Kohl, and Frances Hall, joined together with a group of amateurs to form a local acting company—The Civic Players. By the end of the first season the group had 625 members. Around Christmas 1929 Dr. William E. Upjohn purchased the vacant brick house on the corner where Hezekiah G. Wells once lived and opened it up for the Civic Players' rehearsals and headquarters. The next year Upjohn announced that he was to build a civic auditorium on that site. The building was designed by Aymar Embury II and dedicated on 12 October 1931.

A small, green-covered report known as the Crane Plan locked in the changes in and around Bronson Park. The Kalamazoo City Planning Commission hired a consultant, Jacob L. Crane, Jr., to design

13Ibid., p. 157.
the basic elements of a comprehensive city plan which he completed in December 1929. This report included farsighted plans for the street and highway system, zoning and ordinance restrictions, and a subdivision platting control besides an overall revamping of the cosmopolitan downtown center. Crane said "The fact is that the building of a beautiful city is dependent in the first place upon orderly, economical development designed to serve the commercial and social life of the people."¹⁴

Plate one of the Crane Report pictured the nucleus of the downtown business district. Significantly, Crane chose Bronson Park around which to build his civic center. He stated that Kalamazoo was lucky to have a ready-made setting for such a civic center in the "heart of the city."¹⁵ The plans show Bronson Park in the center with the old churches, the Y.W.C.A., the Courthouse and the library still surrounding it. But new buildings were planned; a new city hall was to fill the entire block on South Street from St. John's Place to Rose Street, and a post office next to the library further on down South Street. The proposed Civic Auditorium remained in the plans but any remaining lots on the corners of Park and Academy Streets and Park and South Streets were to become part of the surrounding business district. No private residences appear in this set of plans.

¹⁴Kalamazoo, Michigan, Kalamazoo City Plan Commission, Jacob L. Crane, Jr., consultant, A Report on the Basic Elements of a City Plan for Kalamazoo, Michigan, December 1929, p. 5.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 39.
Crane redesigned Bronson Park to fit his concept of the focal point of the city. "Then, the whole design of Bronson Park needs revision to establish a principal axis and direct pedestrian ways across Bronson Park between the City Hall and the courthouse." The trees were not to be disturbed unless absolutely necessary and the Indian Mound was to be preserved in its present location.

The Crane Plan was not implemented but it remained as a guide for future use and therefore was an important influence. On 12 March 1931 Mayor S. Rudolph Light laid the cornerstone for the new City Hall. The site on South Street had been purchased years before, but only now did the old Frank Milham house make way for the public structure. The Art Deco styled building did not extend over the entire block as pictured in the Crane Report, thus the Park Club remained. But, in keeping with the plans, the new W.P.A. sponsored county building did fill most of Courthouse Square in 1937.

With the deepening of the depression, the city turned to federally sponsored Works Progress Administration projects. These projects included the new county building, two new runways for the airport, a golf course at Milham Park, new railroad gradings and sidewalks, wider streets, an athletic field, and stadium at Western State Teachers College and, most important to Bronson Park, a $360,958 Park Program. The 1938 parks improvement project created

16Ibid.

17Dunbar, Kalamazoo and How It Grew, p. 168.
one year's work for 438 men of which the city paid only about $30,000.\textsuperscript{18} The program included major and minor improvements and development plans for every park in the city and for Riverside cemetery. From this project Bronson Park received a new underground watering system, new walks, reseeded grass, trimmed trees and funds for the new fountain.

Two years earlier the Kalamazoo Business and Professional Women's Club interested themselves in beautifying the McColl memorial fountain. Many people had been dissatisfied with its daytime appearance so the B.P.W. planned to redesign the outside of the fountain while keeping the lovely, electrically lighted waterworks. Plans for the fountain were sought through a nationwide contest. Twenty-two artists submitted drafts to the judging committee comprised of representatives from the Kalamazoo Art Institute, art department of Central High School, and Western State Teachers College, city commission, and the various garden clubs, as well as members of the club sponsoring the competition.\textsuperscript{19}

The committee awarded the $250 prize to Marcelline Gougler, 24-year-old art instructor at the University of Illinois at Urbana. Gougler submitted two different revised designs upon the request of the jury. But unable to decide, the jury simply submitted both to

\textsuperscript{18}History Room Scrapbook: Parks no. 5, \textit{Kalamazoo Gazette}, 14 July 1938.

\textsuperscript{19}History Room Scrapbook: Parks no. 4, \textit{Kalamazoo Gazette}, 23 February 1936.
the city commission for consideration. The only decision the commis-
sion could come to was to call in Gougler's teacher, Alfonzo Iannelli, for a special consultation. Apparently there was some tech-
nical difficulty in adapting Gougler's plans to the existing water-
works.

Iannelli originally came from the west coast where he worked
with Frank Lloyd Wright. Among other things, he did the sculpturing
for Midway Gardens, Chicago, the bas reliefs at the Adler Planetari-
um, and developed the plans for the Social Science and Havoline Ther-
mometer Tower at the Chicago World's Fair. Iannelli came to Kalama-
zoo to help make minor changes in his student's design, but by the
time he submitted his redesigned plans, they bore no resemblance to
Gougler's work. Iannelli designed his own fountain.

However, Iannelli's modernistic model of this design was not
universally praised. The city commission gave it their full approval
as being just what Bronson Park needed.20 In the meantime certain
of the women's groups of the city viewed the model and loudly
voiced their displeasure with it. "The commissioners being better
diplomats than art critics, decided informally that maybe it would
be better to go slow in the matter of approving the design."21 So
Iannelli built a complete scale model of the fountain, which was
placed on display at the city hall. The model, set in a miniature

20History Room Scrapbook: Parks no. 5, Kalamazoo Gazette,
13 October 1938.

21Ibid.
Bronson Park, later moved to the American National Bank where ballots were provided for citizen's reactions. Apparently the modern-art fans triumphed as the Iannelli design was ultimately approved and constructed at the east end of the park.

For the Bronson Park fountain, Iannelli made wooden casting boxes in his Chicago studio and shipped them to Kalamazoo for the pouring of the aggregate concrete. In 1939 he personally supervised the construction and the integration with parts of the old McColl works. To the west of the fountain, Iannelli added two large reflecting pools to heighten the effect of the nighttime lighting.

The city planned a dedication dinner and program at the Civic Auditorium on 6 June 1940. Iannelli himself talked about the significance of the fountain design.

The scheme of the fountain conveys the:

advance of the pioneers and the generations that follow, showing the movement westward, culminating in the tower—symbol of the pioneer. The Indian is shown in a posture of noble resistance, yet being absorbed as the white man advances. The pattern of the parapet rail indicates the rich vegetation and produce of the land. I feel the new electric fountain in Bronson Park has grown out of the traditions of Kalamazoo. . . . It is your folklore, and unlike fountains in some other cities, it exemplifies something about Kalamazoo.  


23 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

After 1940 the Bronson Park area continued to grow and change. But these changes were only the continuation of earlier trends. Various groups placed newer memorials in the park; a new library replaced the original stone structure on the corner of Rose Street and South Street. The Academy of Music building, renamed the Regent Theatre, was replaced by another public building, the I.S.B. Business Center. A Kalamazoo Art Center on the corner of South Street and Park Street reinforced the concept of Bronson Park as a cultural center. Kirk Newman built a new fountain sculpture to sit in the reflecting pool of Iannelli's fountain, and over the years, park benches, lamp posts, and trash containers have been altered as expediency demanded.

Between 1830 and 1940 Bronson Park went through many changes. As Kalamazoo grew, the citizens altered the way they used their central park. What began as village blocks containing a jail and a school first became an untended field and then was transformed through the years into a shady, green park. The citizens began using the area as an important gathering place for celebrations and political rallies. Influenced by the national "gardenesque" movement, the people of Kalamazoo in the 1890s decorated Bronson Park with elaborate floral displays. After the turn of the century the citizens' concept of the park changed. They replaced residences
with public buildings, and flower beds with brass memorials. Even the old paths and fountain made way for updated versions.

Although much in and around Bronson Park has changed over the years, it is significant that the park, itself, still remains. The people of Kalamazoo are still concerned about the fate of the park as evidenced by the public outcry when a tornado in 1980 damaged many of the old trees. The park is heavily used during the lunch hour by Kalamazoo business people. As in the past, organizations still use the park for gatherings, concerts, folk festivals, and art shows. At present a mobile band stage sits in the west half of the park, reminiscent of the turn of the century bandstand. Even the old political rallies of the 1850s and 1860s had their echoes in the student peace demonstrations in the early 1970s.

Behind the history of Bronson Park are people. The park was created, improved, and preserved due to the interest and concern of Kalamazoo citizens. Many people today, as in the past, feel a certain emotional tie to it. Generations of children growing up in Kalamazoo have built memories of their own in Bronson Park.
APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY OF KALAMAZOO AND BRONSON PARK EVENTS, 1829-1940

1829—Titus Bronson's entry to Kalamazoo area.

1831—Bronson/Richardson register Plat Map of area.

—3.6 acres donated by founder, later to become Bronson Park.

1832—Village granted a post office with town's first doctor, Johnathan Abbott, as Postmaster.


1833—The Michigan and Huron Institute granted a charter.

—First township elections held.

—Town's first hotel opened: the Kalamazoo House.

1834—Federal Land Office moved from White Pigeon to Kalamazoo.

1835—A Branch of the Bank of Michigan opened.

—First newspaper moved to Kalamazoo: Michigan Statesman.

—Tents on the Park for Federal Land Office boom.

—Early residents lived on South Street.

1836—Village of Bronson renamed Kalamazoo.

—County jail located on Jail Square.

1837—St. Luke's Episcopal Church consecrated.

1838—Courthouse built on Court House Square.

—Classes began at Branch of University of Michigan located on Academy Square.

1840—Michigan Indians moved west of the Mississippi River.

1842—First Methodist Church dedicated.

1843—Kalamazoo officially incorporated as a village.
Appendix A continued

1844—Kalamazoo Telegraph newspaper founded.

1845—New jail built on Court House Square.
  —Removal of old jail from Jail Square.

1846—Michigan Central Railroad connected Kalamazoo with Detroit.

1847—Colonel Curtenius and other soldiers left for the Mexican War.
  —Church Street discontinued through Park.

1848—Kalamazoo received first telegraph communication.

1849—First Presbyterian Church built.

1850—Party of Dutch immigrants settled in Kalamazoo.
  —Park Ordinance #29 forbidding horses and cattle in the Park.
  —Indian Mound in Park opened by A. J. Sheldon.

1851—Estimated cost of maintaining the Park, $40/year.
  —J. C. Beach appointed keeper of Park.
  —Principal walks of Park graded and graveled.
  —Avenues of Park lined with trees, roses and shrubs.
  —Sewer connected with the Park from Main Street.

1852—Michigan Central Railroad extended to Chicago.
  —First Congregational Church completed.

1853—Fireman's Hall built on South Burdick.

1854—Park leased to village by county for ten years.
  —Interests of Stephen Richardson's heirs conveyed to the county.

1856—Democratic cannon fired in Bronson Park.
Appendix A continued

1856—H. G. Wells negotiated and obtained quit claim from Richardson's heirs.

—Abraham Lincoln spoke in Park.

—Democratic political rally in Park.

—Petition for removal of Old Branch building.

1857—Removal of Old Branch building.

—Park Ordinance #39 for preservation of the Park.


1861-1865 Civil War

1862—New park fence installed.

1864—99-year lease for Park obtained from county.

—Leveled bumps, more trees planted.

1865—Reformed Church purchased Methodist site and building.

1868—Editorial for improving the Park.

1869—Kalamazoo one of the first Michigan communities to have municipal well and waterworks.

1870—Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad opened.

1874—"Kalamazoo School Case" settled president for tax-supported high school.

1876—Standing committee appointed for Parks and Public Grounds.

—4 July exercises at Park at 12:00.

—Petition to name Park in honor of Titus Bronson.

—Name officially changed by village board.

—First paid fire department hired.

1877—Germans used Bronson Park for picnic.
Appendix A continued

1877—H. G. Wells investigated power of village to improve Park.
  —August celebration in Bronson Park.
  —Proposal of Adam Oliver for improving Park.

1878—First telephone line installed.
  —Oliver plan improvements implemented.

1879—Gas lamps and drinking fountains added.
  —Basin of Park fountain finished in cement with wire fence surrounding.
  —Two tulip trees planted.
  —4 July celebration in Park.

1880—Decoration Day exercises in Park.
  —Sewer connected Park basin with jail sewer.
  —Fountain improvements executed.
  —Workingman's excursion party visited Park.
  —Ordinances 7, 8, 9, and 10 drafted to protect Park and fountain.

1881—First sanitary sewers laid.
  —Academy of Music built.
  —Trees in Park trimmed.
  —Cement walks built on south and east ends of Park.
  —Petition to rename Church Street, St. John's Place filed.
  —Plan submitted for drainage of low parts of Park.

1882—Police department organized.
  —City mail delivery began.
Appendix A continued

1882—Park keeper appointed.
    —Cement walk laid on west end of Park.
1883—Fountain design donated to city but never used.
1884—Village incorporated as a city.
    —Streetcars pulled by horses installed.
    —New brick courthouse built.
    —Old Presbyterian Church burned.
    —Park seats painted, secured and repaired.
    —4 July and Decoration Day celebrations held in the Park.
1885—Fences built in Park to protect grass.
    —Water and gas fixtures repaired and painted.
    —Upjohn Pill and Granule Co. founded.
    —Memorial services held for U. S. Grant.
1886—First electric light and power plant installed.
    —Drainage project for northside and sidewalks completed.
1888—Geraniums planted in Park.
1889—Borgess Hospital opened.
    —Petition filed for bandstand in Park.
1890—Park decorated in vases and flowers.
1891—25 new park seats added.
    —More flower beds and vases set in Bronson Park.
    —4 July celebration held in Park.
1892—Park walks newly graveled and reduced in width.
    —Hardier plants and bulbs introduced.
Appendix A continued

1892—Park used for Sunday School activities.

1893—Electric streetcars replaced horse drawn cars.
   —New Kalamazoo Public Library building opened.
   —William Oliver appointed gardener of parks.

1894—First brick paving laid in city.
   —Petition filed for Kalamazoo Gas Light Co. to set gas lamps in Bronson Park.

1895—Petition signed to establish popcorn stand in Park.

1896—Labor Day celebration held in Park.
   —William J. Bryan spoke in Bronson Park.

1898—W. R. Shafter, Spanish American War General, spoke in Park.
   —Memorial to U.S.S. Maine placed in Park.
   —W.C.T.U. held 4 July celebration in Park.

1899—Bronson Park pavilion built.
   —McKinley opened street fair.
   —Bronson Park connected to public sewer.

1900—George W. Taylor bought first automobile in city.
   —Electric interurban service connected to Battle Creek.

1903—Western State Normal School located in Kalamazoo.

1904—Cornerstone of Kalamazoo Hospital laid.
   —Park Club organized.
   —Odd Fellows used park for Memorial Day.
   —D.A.R. petitioned for use of Bronson Park.

1905—12 seats purchased for Bronson Park.
Appendix A continued

1906—Kalamazoo's first motion picture theatre opened.

1907—Liberty pole raised in memory of pioneers and patriots: D.A.R.

1908—Bronson Park pavilion removed.

   —Benches purchased.
   —Fish donated for pool.
   —Granite marker placed by G.A.R.
   —Silver Anniversary of Kalamazoo as a city celebrated.

1911—Pool and fountain repaired by city.

1913—Tablet for Richard Westnedge Camp placed in Park by No. 16 of Spanish American War veterans.


1915—Fire department purchased first two motorized fire trucks.
   —Two drinking fountains added and walks improved.

1917—America entered the World War.

1918—Kalamazoo adopted city manager-commission form of government.

1920—Big Armistice Day celebration held in Park.

1921—Bronson Park's property value listed at $126,000.
   —Band concerts held in Park.
   —Allied services petitioned for ordinance enforcing cleanliness of Park.

1923—Kalamazoo Institute of Fine Arts organized.

1924—Site on South Street obtained for City Hall.
Appendix A continued

1924—Bronze statue of Spanish War veterans placed in Park.

1925—Granite marker placed by Orcutt Post, G.A.R. number 79 and Women’s Relief Corps, number 110.
   —First Congregational Church burned.

1926—First Methodist Church burned.
   —Fifty-year anniversary of naming Bronson Park.
   —First Presbyterian Church gutted by fire.
   —McColl fountain installed.

1927—Formal opening of new electric fountain.
   —Park drained and east end filled.
   —Petition filed to erect a bird feeding station.

1928—First Municipal Airport in Michigan built south of the city.
   —Bronson Park served as starting point for tour guide.
   —New First Presbyterian Church built.

1929—Dr. William Upjohn bought house for Civic Players.
   —New cement curbing and walks added to Park.
   —New First Methodist Church dedicated.

1931—Crane Plan published.
   —Cornerstone laid for City Hall.
   —Civic Auditorium opened.
   —WKZO, city’s first radio station, began broadcasting.
   —1907 Liberty Pole removed from Park.

1932—Entire Park filled and reseeded.
   —Parkway around Park sodded.
Appendix A continued

1932—Trees in Bronson Park treated.

1934—City buses replaced last of trolley cars.
    —G.A.R. Boulder to be placed where Lincoln spoke.

1936—Cornerstone laid for W.P.A.-financed County Building.
    —Business and Professional Women's Club held contest for fountain design.
    —Marcelline Gougler won contest prize.

1937—Kalamazoo City free of all debts.
    —Architect Iannelli presented model for fountain.

1938—Plan submitted for Park underground sprinklers.

1939—McColl fountain dismantled.
    —New fountain and paths laid out for Park.

1940—Iannelli's fountain dedicated.

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Maps


Illustrated Atlas of Kalamazoo County, Michigan. Containing General Maps of Townships, showing Farmlands with Acres and Owners Names, Railroads, Wagon Roads, Streams, Lakes, etc., etc.; Detail Plats of Kalamazoo City and Interior Villages, Showing Dimensions of Lots, Location of Water Mains, Sewers, Buildings, etc. Also Maps of the Hemispheres, World, United States and Michigan, with Early and Present History of Kalamazoo County. Detroit: William Sauer, 1890.

Map of Kalamazoo, Michigan. C. F. Miller, Civil Engineer and Draughtsman. [c. 1859].


Plat of the Town of Bronson. March 12, 1831 by Bronson and Richardson. Twp 2 South Range 11 West Southwest Quarter of Section 15 in the County of Kalamazoo, 1831.

Plat of the Village of Bronson, the County Seat of Kalamazoo County. Lucius Lyon, Titus Bronson, Justus Burdick and T. C. Sheldon Proprietors, 1834.