

PRESERVE PIONEER PARK

A resident committee to keep Pioneer Park
Clean, Green and Serene

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Pioneer Park History

My name is Deborah Hutchins and I live on Grand Oaks Lane. I volunteered on the Beautification Commission in the late 1990s and learned of the history of Pioneer Park then and from others since.

Of all our city parks, Pioneer has a unique history and character. A significant factor in its development was the desire to obtain passive parkland and to commemorate the pioneers who founded our city.

In a passive recreation area, the quality of the environment and the “naturalness” of the area are the focus of the recreational experience. Consequently, a passive recreation area is generally an undeveloped space or an environmentally sensitive area with minimal development.¹

In the late 1980s, the Council and Parks & Recreation Commission foresaw the development pressure so obvious today. They committed to aggressively acquiring parkland² to meet “*the esthetic, recreational, and environmental protection needs of the city*”.³ Two adjacent properties on the west side of Deerfield Rd were earmarked as *Pioneer Park in honor of the city's first settlers*.

The City couldn't afford to develop Pioneer Park and feared the land would be lost. Then City Manager Jon Bormet declared: “*Many of us felt it would have been a tragedy because the land is so beautiful.*”⁴ Obtaining a grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (*for a nature preserve on property bordering the creek*) was considered but deemed too slow.² Subdivision proposals from residential builders preserved only a fraction of the land.^{5,6}

In 1990, 1140 residents signed an initiative petition that urged the preservation of Pioneer for “*parkland and greenspace*”.⁷ The electorate approved a tax levy that allowed the city to acquire the park property.⁸ As a result, one of the last remaining green areas in Montgomery was saved.

Mr. Richard Tuten, Vice Mayor at the time, recalls: “*Green space preservation was a principle that Council agreed on unanimously.*”⁸ Seeking a balance between active and passive areas,^{2,6,9,10} the northern section was flattened for active recreation; the southern section, an ecologically sensitive section that was home to a variety of wildlife,¹¹ was retained as *passive parkland*. This preserved the natural topography, the drainage ravine, the most heavily forested area, and the existing pond. The City Manager envisioned “*a passive facility with walking trails, bike path and pond*”.⁴

During the Montgomery's Bicentennial in 1995, a Native American Chief of the Shawnee tribe attended a ceremony at the Park.^{8,12} The Shawnee tribe had historically occupied this land and the Chief was pleased to see it preserved.

In 1995 the present landscape plan was approved to make the passive area *user-friendly to residents of all ages*.¹³⁻¹⁵ The plan was recreational, educational, and commemorative of the city's founders and the historical Ohio landscape. “*It was a nice opportunity to do something in terms of passive recreation,*” said the designer, Matt Ensign. “*I did the butterfly gardens not only because they have habitat value, but educational value.*”¹⁶

These past visionaries hope that the present generation will be equally committed preserving green space. Please carry the torch and preserve the rustic character of this unique and limited passive space.

Thank you.

References

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2. BORMET J. Memorandum to Juanita Conklin, Chairperson, Parks, Recreation and Landmarks Committee. Park Land Acquisition. Summary of Recommendations. Montgomery, Ohio, 1987.
3. City of Montgomery Comprehensive Community Plan. Cited in: Memorandum to Juanita Conklin, Chairperson, Parks, Recreation and Landmarks Committee. Park Land Acquisition. Summary of Recommendations. 1987.
4. SCOTT L. An affordable park proposal. Photocopy of newspaper article, 1990.
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11. O'KEEFE B. Memorandum to Beautification Commission on Pioneer Meadow on the southwest portion of Pioneer bordering Sycamore Creek, 1998.
12. Barnaclo, R. 1995 Montgomery Bicentennial celebration. (Personal Communication), 2006.
13. Pioneer Park Gets a Makeover. Photocopy of article, 1995.
14. ST. CLAIR P. Butterflies are feeling free in this park. Cincinnati Enquirer. Cincinnati, Ohio, Saturday, June 24, 2000.
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