

Rediscover Your Parks





In 2011, the Gallup and Knight Foundation’s “Soul of the Community” study indicated that aesthetics, primarily parks and trails, are rated the greatest strength of the Fort Wayne Community. Our award-winning park system is something we’re all lucky to have, but luck has nothing to do with the rare, pristine beauty of these historical landmarks tended by the Fort Wayne Parks & Recreation Department. As you’ll learn in this brochure, and on your park tours today, the visualization of our city’s shared public lands began long ago with a master plan that was the combined effort of brilliant landscape architects. The original vision has been modified and expanded, but most of all, it has been nurtured by the legacy of park advocates, dedicated staff and committed citizens—like you—who believe in preserving our cherished parks for future generations.

**Al Moll, Executive Director
Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation**

Greetings ! Fort Wayne, like many American cities, was planned to be a City in a Garden at the turn of the last century. This means that in 1912 our parks were planned to be linked to neighborhoods and to the rivers by a series of beautiful and functional boulevards. Using the rivers as the focal point, our city was conceived to be a cohesive landscape in which people could live, do business and prosper. For the most part, that landscape vision has been carried out and a great deal of it exists still today.

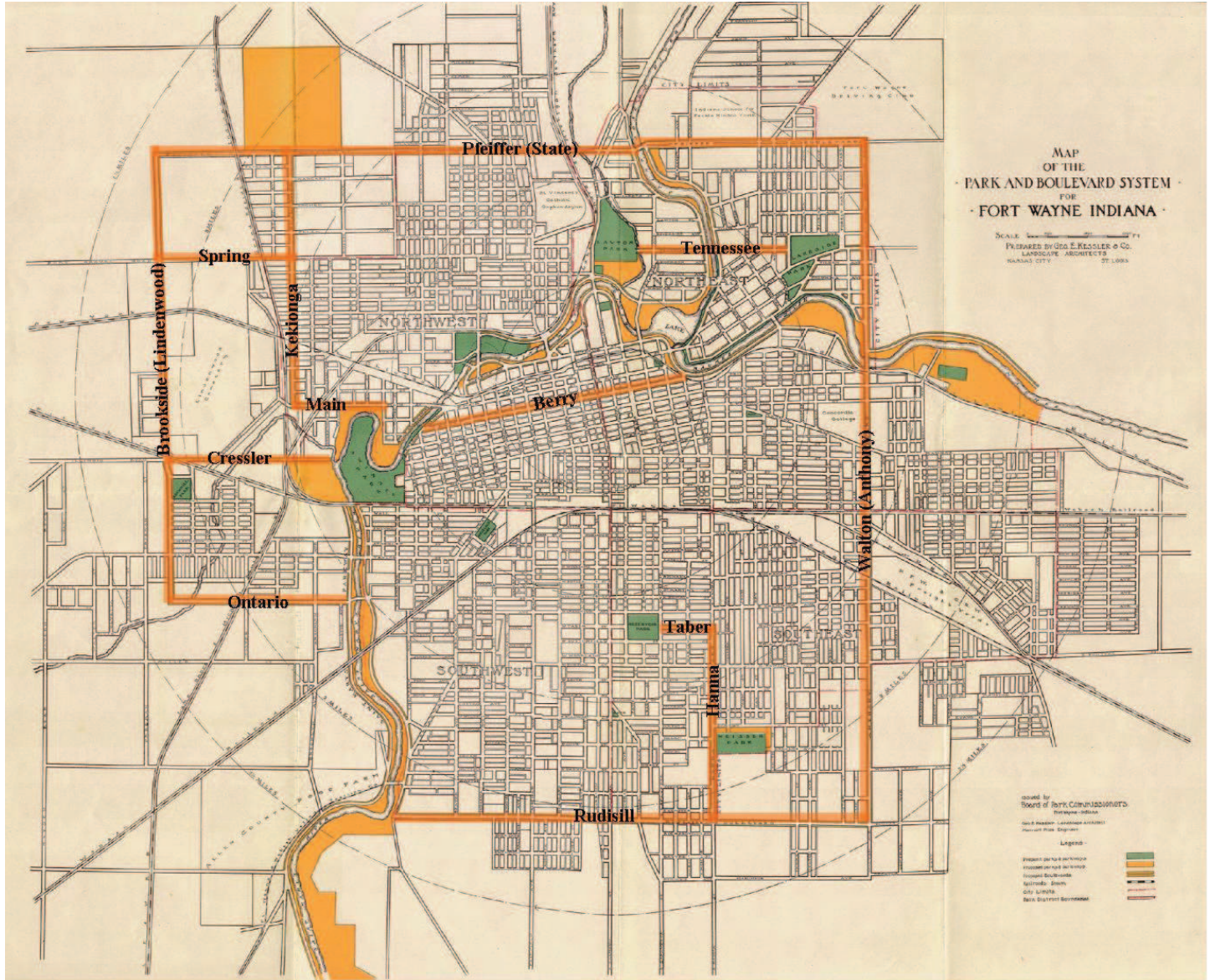
This booklet describes some of the parks, along with Rudisill Boulevard, and presents biographies of a number of people who designed them.

Today, plans called Cultural Landscape Reports are in place to be sure that we can maintain the vision that makes Fort Wayne a beautiful place to live. You can find these plans on the Parks and Recreation Department website: www.fortwayneparks.org

On behalf of The Friends of the Parks of Allen County and the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department, we hope and trust you will enjoy “rediscovering” these Fort Wayne park gems.

**Julie Donnell, President
Friends of the Parks of Allen County**





Fort Wayne Park and Boulevard System

The Fort Wayne Park and Boulevard System was significantly shaped by landscape architects George Kessler, Arthur Shurcli , and Adolph Jaenicke. Two successive presidents of the independent Board of Park Commissioners, Colonel David Foster and Fred Shoa , ensured that the combined vision of these designers developed into the 1960s by influencing the selection of landscape architects in both the public and private realms.

George Kessler's 1912 master plan organized and expanded upon the city's urban landscape, incorporating the three rivers that converge in Fort Wayne and connecting existing parks with new boulevards and parks, providing incentive for residential and commercial development. Kessler also designed Rudisill Boulevard, created a plan for Lakeside Park, and designed several features in existing parks.

Beginning in 1916, Arthur Shurcli designed several parks, parkways, and boulevards, and surveyed the parks in 1928. He also designed three subdivisions during this time, and Shoa Park in 1956.

Adolph Jaenicke, Superintendent of Parks from 1917 until 1948, created elaborate amenities and gardens in many of the parks, including the Memorial Grove in Memorial Park, the sunken Rose Garden in Lakeside Park, and the extensive Japanese Gardens in Swinney Park.

In recent years, community and riverfront linkages have been bolstered with the addition of Rivergreenway paths and the completion of Headwaters Park in 1996, which realizes Kessler's original plan for a downtown park.



George Kessler

(1862- 1923)

Fort Wayne's first and only comprehensive city plan, known today as the Kessler Park and Boulevard System, was just that: A Park and Boulevard System and it was designed by a landscape architect who based his work on the topography and rivers of our city.

Kessler, born in the little village Bad Frankenhausen, Germany, spent his youth in the United States, but returned to Germany for his education in landscape architecture. He entered the private school at Belvedere where he studied botany, forestry and design with Hofgartner Julius Hartwig and Garteninspektor Julius Skell. He then studied civil engineering at the University of Jena and at the Neue Garten in Potsdam with Hofgartner Theodore Nietner.

After his return to the US in 1882, Fredrick Law Olmsted Sr. (who designed Central Park in NYC) recommended Kessler for work in Kansas, which led him to design the first Park and Boulevard System for Kansas City. His career went on to include work all over the country, notably park and boulevard systems for Syracuse, NY, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, St. Louis and Dallas. During WWI he did work for the US Housing Corporation, and provided master plans for the Camp Planning Division.

A proponent of the "City Practical" as well as the "City Beautiful", Kessler's plan for Fort Wayne focuses on the beauty of the rivers and park spaces, while, at the same time, the boulevard improvements and their positioning provided for the economic expansion of the city as well.



Arthur Asahel Shurcliff (Shurtleff)

(1870- 1957)

Arthur Asahel Shurtleff was born in Boston and, as he grew up, was influenced greatly by the writings of Emerson and Thoreau. (He changed the spelling of his name in 1930.) He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1894. His degree in mechanical engineering destined him for a career of inventing and producing surgical instruments in the family business, but he felt suited for other types of planning and, after consulting with Fredrick Law Olmsted Sr. and his associate Charles Eliot, he continued his education at Harvard University under Eliot, graduating with a second BS in 1896. (There was no degree in Landscape Architecture at the time.)

The next 8 years he worked in the Olmsted offices, and traveled abroad to study planning in significant places. In 1899 Shurcliff and Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr. founded the first four year degree program in Landscape Architecture in the country at Harvard University.

He established his own practice in 1904 and had a long and successful career. Examples of his work can be found in the industrial communities of Bemis, Tennessee, sections of Hopedale, Massachusetts, and a WWI housing project in Bridgeport, Connecticut. His most well known, and perhaps the most important of his career, was his assistance to the firm Perry, Shaw and Hepburn in John Rockefeller's restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.

His work in Fort Wayne builds on the original Kessler vision. Connecting to State Boulevard is the Brookview Neighborhood following Spy Run Creek to Vesey Park. He created plans to connect Swinney Park with Wildwood Park and beyond (Jefferson Boulevard and North Washington Road) to the Fort Wayne Country Club. Lafayette Place, with its esplanade, is his design. In addition he reviewed and contributed designs for several of Fort Wayne's Parks and finally, at the end of his career, designed Shoa Park.



Adolphe Jaenicke

Adolphe Jaenicke was hired as Superintendent of Parks and City Forester in 1917. He died in 1948, having served the community for 31 years.

Jaenicke brought a truly international point of view to Fort Wayne's developing park and boulevard system. He was born in Berlin, Germany and studied horticulture at the University of Berlin, followed by seven years of graduate and professional work in Paris, London and Switzerland. He came to the United States at the request of W. Atlee Burpee, who wanted him to share his successful seed growing techniques. He was associated with the John Lewis Childs Floral Park in New York and the St. Louis Botanical Gardens as well.

Among his accomplishments were the Jaenicke Gardens in Swinney Park, an extensive Japanese style garden which was not only beautiful, but reclaimed the Junk Ditch running through the park; the Lakeside Rose Garden; and the design of Memorial Park as an homage to the service men and women who lost their lives in WWI. He worked to acquire land along the St. Joseph River for the Boulevard and was active in the land acquisition for Fort Wayne's first municipal airport. In addition he started a program where children planted gardens which was adopted across the nation.



Nationally recognized for his accomplishments, Adolphe Jaenicke was awarded a special citation by the Men's Garden Clubs of America in 1945, an award that had been reserved for accomplished landscape architects such as Jens Jensen.



Rudisill Boulevard

This three-mile road was developed by the Board of Park Commissioners in Fort Wayne, Indiana, beginning in 1912. George Kessler provided the standards for the design of the 100-foot wide boulevard. The roadway runs east-west, and is divided with a central median measuring 40 feet wide; four 10-foot wide lanes accommodating two-way vehicular traffic; and a 30-foot shoulder on each side of the road. A five-foot mow strip, originally planted with Oriental plane trees, separates the roadway from corresponding sidewalks. A second band of turf, also planted with Oriental plane trees, separates the public roadway from adjacent private lots. A 25-foot residential buffer was added in the mid-1920s as a result of development on the boulevard.

Rudisill Boulevard connects McMillen Park and Foster Park along the St. Mary's River. The interconnectedness between the boulevard and the parks immediately spurred neighborhood development along its western portion. Development did not come to the eastern section of the road until after World War II. The central core of the boulevard serves as a commercial area; a traffic light was installed in 1966 and the road was widened in 1973 to accommodate greater traffic, resulting in the removal of bands of trees and turf.



Foster Park

In 1911 George Kessler recommended placing a large park on both sides of the St. Mary's River between the Stellhorn Bridge and Swinney Park. In March 1912, Park Board President Colonel David N. Foster and his brother Samuel M. Foster purchased and donated 67 acres of wooded land along the river. By 1926 the park was Fort Wayne's largest at 255 acres, more than half of which were donated by the Foster family.



Kessler located Foster Park at the western end of what became Rudisill Boulevard, intending to attract residents to the undeveloped southwest side of the city. His concept was successful, with popular new neighborhoods and development underway within 6 years of the park's opening.

Today, Foster Park offers extensive flower gardens, three historic outdoor pavilions, playgrounds, baseball fields, tennis courts and a replica of Abraham Lincoln's Birth Cabin. Foster Park also includes the city's first public golf course, built in 1927. A



1928 footbridge over the St. Mary's River designed by engineer A.K. Hofer connects Foster Park with Indian Village Park. In recent years, Foster Park has been linked with the Rivergreenway, which follows the banks of the St. Mary's, St. Joseph and Maumee Rivers.

Lakeside Park

The uncredited 1912 master plan for Lakeside Park is likely the work of George Kessler, who designed the Park and Boulevard Plan for Fort Wayne the same year. Land for this 23.8 acre landscape was purchased in 1908, with excavation for lagoons beginning in 1911, a refectory pavilion constructed in 1916, an Italianate sunken garden and pergola built in 1925, and tennis courts installed in 1928.



The most classical element in this otherwise picturesque landscape is the sunken garden. Designed in 1921 by Superintendent of Parks Adolphe Jaenicke, the garden contained over 1000 plants and was named a National Rose Garden in 1928. Its strict geometry is a natural fit with its context, bracketed on three sides by city streets and private residences. Throughout the park walks connect to the nearby street grid. Historic photographs reveal ornate furniture and flowerbeds. Four lagoons, both natural and excavated, are featured in the original plans, along

with serpentine paths, a curvilinear drive, and bridges leading to islands in the lagoons.



Today, a sculpture honoring Fort Wayne's Civil War hero Henry Lawton is located in the park. The rose garden has recently been renovated. Three lagoons still exist, with one filled to create a baseball field.

This year the skating pond will be rehabilitated.

McMillen Park

McMillen Park is sited on relatively high ground on land that was originally a magnificent hickory grove which spanned Rudisill Boulevard to Foster Park. Much of the grove was replaced with farmlands and the land that became McMillen Park was defined by its woodlands and its open areas, rather than Fort Wayne's rivers. The juxtaposition of the woodland and the open space created an incomparable experience for park users.

McMillen Park is also the first park in the system to be established entirely from donated lands and funds. In 1936 Mr. and Mrs. Dale McMillen purchased 74 acres and donated it to the city for use as parkland. In the 1944 *Fort Wayne Long Range Recreation Plan*, which divided the city into areas served by specific parks, McMillen Park is considered an area park, demonstrating its importance to the overall development of the surrounding neighborhoods. The McMillens added 40 acres in 1951 and 50 more acres in 1957.

Believed to be the first artificial ice skating rink in Indiana, the McMillen Ice Arena was dedicated in 1957.

McMillen Park is host to the Lifetime Sports Academy, a golf course and swimming pool, as well as athletic fields and remnant woods.



Memorial Park

Acquired by the Fort Wayne Board of Park Commissioners in 1918, 42-acre Memorial Park was designed by Superintendent of Parks Adolph Jaenicke as a memorial to the Fort Wayne lives lost in World War I. The land previously served as a golf course and occasional landing field to aviator Art Smith. Jaenicke's design took advantage of the pre-existing golf course topography, inserting winding roads into the hills



that created a canyon-like effect. The design was implemented with a Memorial Grove in 1919, a Memorial Column celebrating Art Smith installed in 1928, a War Memorial Arch completed in 1929, and the Pond Memorial Fountain built in 1930. In 1925 Jaenicke added a grotto modeled after the Blue Grotto of Capri, facing the historic Lincoln Highway and marking a gateway to and from the city. Recreational amenities include a 1941 WPA pavilion designed by Leroy Bradley, a baseball diamond that was home to a professional women's baseball team from 1947 to 1954, playgrounds, and a swimming pool. The Blue Grotto has been razed and parking and vehicular roads have been altered since Jaenicke's time, but the park retains most of its design integrity.



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Swinney Park

One of Fort Wayne’s first public parks, Swinney Park was established in 1869 when Colonel Thomas W. Swinney leased his property to the city. Upon his death in 1875, the park was bequeathed to the city with the stipulation that the Swinney family could remain on the property as long as they lived. The park became an integral part of George Kessler’s Park and Boulevard Plan from 1912, serving as both a western gateway to the city and a northern terminus anchor along the St. Mary’s River.



In 1916 Arthur Shurcli incorporated Swinney Park within a larger plan to extend a scenic parkway (now called West Jefferson Boulevard) westward from downtown Fort Wayne to developing automobile suburbs, including Wildwood Park, which Shurcli designed that same year. This drive continues as North Washington Road and connects ultimately to the Fort Wayne Country Club on Covington Road.



The park is roughly divided in half by the St. Mary’s River. The eastern 46 acres are entirely in the floodplain, while the remaining 48 acres consist of both floodplain and higher ground. Within the park are a small man-made lake, recently rehabilitated; the Beaux-Arts Thieme Drive Overlook, designed by George Kessler; and an extensive Japanese Rock Garden begun in 1928 by Jaenicke and extended by the Civil Works Administration in 1933, remnants of which still exist today.

