Manchester Area Youth Sports.

Kirk Park now serves as the location for Manchester’s youth baseball leagues, organized by the Manchester Men’s Club. In 1989, two tennis courts and one basketball court were added with Recreation Bond funding. In 1995, the Manchester Men’s Club financed and constructed the pavilion. The Blue Spruce Lawn Care Company installed a brick walk by the pavilion.

The 1833 plat map of Manchester, which shows nothing but scattered trees across this land (Figure 2). There’s evidence that any sort of development ever occurred. The 1899 aerial photograph of Manchester also shows some trees and plant growth and what appears to be a piles of lumber, but no structures of any kind. In the 1870s-1880s, H.B. Blisser, editor and publisher of The Manchester Advertiser, wrote an article lamenting the state of trash buildup in the village, and the subsequent cleanliness and health consequences resulting therefrom. From his descriptions of these accumulated trash locations as adherence to existing buildings and businesses, it is clear that some of his observations related to the area which would become Kirk Park.

In 1971, the Village Council approved the purchase of the entire Block 15 from Edward R. Kirk and his wife Dorothy M. Kirk for $10,000, which comprises the southern 2/3 of the existing park. They also approved the purchase of Lot 8 in Block 16 from Edward’s cousin Florence C. Kirk and wife Frances C. Kirk. The Village also received $2,000 from Manchester Chicken Broil proceeds, with the intent of developing this land and adjacent parcels occupied by the Village into a park. A community fundraiser was held whenever the field was laid out into “square”, which could be “bought” for $15 donation. Today, a Fundraiser, Manchester’s leading employer at the time, donated their employer’s donation. This aggregated area was then subsequently named “Kirk Park”, in honor of Edward R. Kirk’s long civic commitment to Manchester.

In 1995, the Village received a major grant from the Herrick Foundation, and developed the baseball diamonds which are the primary elements of Kirk Park. Residents in Manchester today still recall stories of the Kirk family and the surrounding land.

Edward R. Kirk

Edward R. Kirk was born November 13, 1908 in Manchester, the son of Ambrose and Rose (Osell) Kirk. He married Dorothy Strack on October 1934 in Adrian, and they had five children. He passed away on August 21, 1988. Edward was a lifetime resident of Manchester, and active in many organizations and community activities. Edward was a 47-year employee of the Union Savings Bank in Manchester (now Comerica Bank), retiring as Vice-President in 1975. He was a member of St. Mary’s Catholic Church and a charter member of the Father Flimmer Council of the Knights of Columbus. He was the Manchester Village Treasurer for 36 years, retiring from that position in 1975. He was also a long-time member of the Manchester Optimist Club, serving as its Treasurer, as well as a member of the St. Mary’s Cemetery Association. In 1948, he became Manchester’s first school bus driver.

The Manchester Handle Company

The Manchester Handle Company has become the place for baseball games in Manchester, particularly for Little League age teams through the Manchester Area Youth Sports organization. It is fitting that directly across the street to the west of the current Kirk Park baseball diamonds is now situated The Manchester Handle Company, which, among other wooden products, made baseball bats subsequently used by American League teams.

The Manchester Handle Company was formed in 1916, and was located on the west side of Clinton Street between Territorial and W. Vernon Streets. The photograph shows in Figure 4 below is the only known image of the plant. The plant was destroyed by fire around 1920, and the business subsequently relocated to Saline.

History of the Land and Park

The land comprising Kirk Park lies between Adrian and Clinton Streets, adjacent to Territorial Street on the south and close to Duncan Street on the north. From the earliest days of Manchester’s settlement in 1833, it has been a low area and subject to water drainage issues due to its adjacency to the River Raisin. The 1832 Original Plat of Manchester did not include any of this property in founder John Gilbert’s vision for the town.

The subsequent 1837 plat by Stephen and James Harvey Fords did designate this land as Blocks 15 and 16, and assumed the new railroad system would come up to the east side on current Adrian Street to the Manchester Mill and the downtown business district. For years, this road was named “Railroad Street”. Perhaps they envisioned a railroad depot where Kirk Park is now, but the rail line and depot were eventually placed further west along Territorial Road when finally completed in 1853.

By examining the 1834 plat map of Manchester, we see a stream bisecting the property feeding into the River Raisin, and no development. The subsequent maps of 1864 and 1870 show all the property as owned by George L. Unterkenner, a wealthy farmer and building investor. Neither map shows any development, again likely due to the low elevation, the bisecting creek, and the lack of water drainage when the river was high. Figure 1 shows an excerpt from the 1870 Delioben Wood survey map of Manchester, centered on blocks 15 and 16.

The 1871 Manchester Bird’s Eye View, shown for its detailed accuracy, shows nothing but scattered trees across this land (Figure 2). There is no evidence that any sort of development ever occurred. The 1899 aerial photograph of Manchester also shows some trees and plant growth and what appears to be a piles of lumber, but no structures of any kind.

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Donors to the 2015 Kirk Park Community Project

The 2015 Kirk Park Community Project brought together community service groups, local businesses, the Manchester Wellness Coalition, the 5 Healthy Towns Foundation, and supporting residents of Manchester to make major repairs and upgrades to the Kirk Park baseball diamonds and children’s playground in cooperation with the Village of Manchester.

Manchester Area Youth Sports (MAYS) assisted with design and facilities requirements. MAYS typically awards 275-325 boys and girls, ages 4-14 in organized baseball and softball teams, from the Village of Manchester and surrounding townships. A number of adult baseball/softball players also benefit from casual use of the diamonds through the park’s reservation system.

The project included:

- Removal of old ball field surface materials; construction of new substructure, field surfaces, and related drainage improvements
- Removal and replacement of all old steel fences, posts and backstops
- Roll-top security windows for concession stand
- Sandblasting of aluminum bleacher frames, repairing and re-painting
- Purchasing and installing new play equipment adjacent to south ball diamond

An opening day dedication ceremony was held April 30, 2016.

5 Healthy Towns Foundation
Manchester Chicken Broil
Worth Repeating
Manchester Area Chamber of Commerce
Manchester Civic Club
Manchester Lions Club
Manchester Men’s Club
Manchester Area Friends
Kiwanis Club of Manchester
Old National Bank
(formerly United Bank & Trust)
CEI Composite Materials
Cameron LaDouceur Memorial Fund
Jack and Elaine Creech
Fred and Joan Gebhardt
Larry and Leach Sweet
Amelia and Brandon Woods

C/omposite M/aterials

The 2015 Kirk Park Community Project

Support from 2016 Community Tourism Action Plan

Funded by: Washtenaw County CVB and the Village of Manchester DDA

Support from 2016 Community Tourism Action Plan