

# The Creation of Ferndale's Parks & Recreation Department

## HISTORY OF

Circa mid 1950s

### FERNDALE RECREATION PROGRAM

Ferndale's Recreation Program originated in the spring of 1926 when the Ferndale Board of Education hired Robert L. Peel to organize a year 'round recreation program and to be the director of athletics at Lincoln High School.

Ferndale was one of several Royal Oak Township cities where a summer recreation program was organized. During the summer Mr. Peel was loaned to the cities in Royal Oak Township, where he organized and supervised a summer recreation program with funds supplied by the Couzen's Foundation. This Ferndale and Royal Oak Township program continued during the years and summers of 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930 and 1931. The Couzen's Foundation withdrew their support at the end of the summer playground season in 1931. They decided to supply milk and shoes for children rather than help finance a summer playground program during the depression.

Ferndale was without an indoor recreation program in the fall and winter of 1931.

Mrs. Libbey Miller Phillips, a former Detroit recreation worker, was hired to organize and direct a summer program for 1932. Funds for this program came from the Ferndale P.T.A., the Board of Education and the City of Ferndale. The playground program concluded at the end of the summer and again Ferndale was without a 1932-1933 fall and winter recreation program.

During the spring of 1934 Richard Rowley was engaged to organize a recreation program. Funds for the summer recreation program came from the Ferndale P.T.A. Counsel, the Board of Education, and the City of Ferndale.

During August of 1934 the Ferndale Emergency Relief Administration came into being and assisted the Ferndale Recreation Program with funds and workers. With this help Mr. Rowley organized an indoor recreation program for the fall and winter of 1934 and 1935.

During the fall of 1934 Ferndale's Freshman College opened at Lincoln High along with an Adult Education Program. The National Youth Administration Program directed by Cleve R. Bradshaw, former principal of Lincoln High School and the Works Progress Administration provided workers and made funds available to the Ferndale Recreation Program directed by Mr. Rowley. This program continued during 1935 and 1936. At the end of the summer playground season in 1937, the regulation of the N.Y.A. and the W.P.A. national programs were changed.

During the fall and winter of 1937 and 1938, Ferndale was again without an indoor recreation program.

During the year of 1937, 8½ acres of the Hough property on Earl Blvd. was acquired by the City and the Board of Education for park and playground purposes. This property was later called Roosevelt Park.

During the fall of 1937 a group of Ferndale's citizens who were interested in a recreation program appealed to the City Commission for funds to provide a

HISTORY OF THE FERNDALE RECREATION PROGRAM (Continued)

recreation program at this time but a Recreation Commission was appointed by the city to study the possibility of establishing a year 'round recreation program. This committee was composed of Mrs. Arlene Raske, Hugh Leddicat, Maurice F. Cole, W. L. Dumond, E. J. McRay from Ferndale and Warren Van Gilbert, from Pleasant Ridge. This committee studied recreation programs in several Michigan cities and gathered data for a Ferndale Recreation Program.

During the spring of 1938, with the approval of the City and the Board of Education, this committee hired Paul Allison and Bonita Crowshaw to organize and operate a summer playground program. Money was appropriated by the City of Ferndale and the Board of Education for this program.

At the end of the summer playground program in 1938 there was a small balance on hand.

During the fall of 1938 the Recreation Commission hired Bud Brown on a part-time basis to organize a recreation program for the indoor season of 1938 and 1939. The money to support this program came from the unused money left from the summer program of 1938.

During the fall and winter of 1938 and the spring of 1939 meetings were held by the Recreation Commission to study and improve the Ferndale Recreation Program.

During the spring of 1939 Bud Brown was hired by the Board of Education on a full-time basis to organize a year 'round recreation program. At this time the newly formed Recreation Commission formed in 1937 was dissolved. The money to support a year 'round program was to be appropriated by the Board of Education and the City of Ferndale.

During the fall of 1939 the Recreation Office moved from the Board of Education Building to 434 West Nine Mile Road. The title to this building was held by the Ferndale Board of Education. The Recreation Department shared this building with John Carey who was the Ferndale director of the N.Y.A. Program. Leaders for the Recreation Program in the schools and the Community Center Building were obtained from the W.P.A. whose program was being directed by Mrs. Jeanette Blanchard, and the N.Y.A. being directed by Mr. Carey.

During the fall of 1939, the Lincoln High School Gymnasium addition was dedicated and was used during the fall and winter as one of the facilities for indoor recreation.

In September 1939 the Recreation Department in cooperation with P.T.A.'s and the Ferndale Police Department organized the first all-city school Halloween Parties, with all Ferndale schools holding a party for the first time.

During the summer of 1940, in cooperation with the Lincoln High School, lights and bleachers were acquired for Jefferson Field, where lighted recreation softball games and Lincoln High School football games could be played.

HISTORY OF THE FERNDALE RECREATION PROGRAM (Continued)

Fortunately for Ferndale and the future of Ferndale, City Manager Jay F. Gibbs and Superintendent of Schools, Edgar F. Down recommended that more park property be acquired by the City and the Board of Education. Both bodies were agreeable and the parks now known as Harding, Wilson, Taft and Jefferson were acquired. Residents of Ferndale, present and future, will always be grateful to these two men for their foresight and action to include these parks in Ferndale's master plan. Martin Road, Mapledale and Wanda Parks were acquired later by the City.

During 1940 the recreation program added more youth and adult activities to the program and the budget was increased accordingly.

During 1941, 1942, 1943, and 1944 the program continued to grow. During 1945 a gymnasium was added to Grant School and recreation activities were included in this gymnasium.

In September of 1945 the Recreation Office returned to the Board of Education Building, 130 East Nine Mile Road, and shared office space with the Adult Education Program directed by Harold Wilcox.

The Lincoln High School Pool was used for the first time during the summer of 1947 and the indoor season of 1947 and 1948.

In July of 1948 by agreement of the City of Ferndale and the Ferndale Board of Education, a Recreation Advisory Committee was organized. This committee included J. F. Gibbs, City Manager; Paul V. Engstrom, member of the Board of Education; Sidney G. Hill, member of the City Commission; Roy E. Robinson, Superintendent of Schools; and Bud Brown, Director of Recreation. At the first meeting in 1948, Mrs. Nina F. Knobloch and David C. Pence were appointed to the Recreation Advisory Committee. This committee held frequent meetings in 1948 and in March of 1949, regular meetings were held on the first Thursday of each month.

In May of 1949, W. A. Laking became City Manager and a member of the Recreation Advisory Committee. During the year of 1949 the property known as Mapledale Park was improved and during the summer a playground program was in operation for the first time.

During 1950 gymnasiums were added to the Jefferson, Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, and Harding schools, and recreation activities were included in these gymnasiums beginning with the fall of 1950.

During 1951 the property known as Wanda Park was acquired, and during the summer a playground was operated at the newly completed Andrew Jackson School in Oak Park. During the summer of 1953 playground equipment, a ball diamond, and a backstop had been installed in Wanda Park and it was already for use, during the summer months.

HISTORY OF THE FERNDALE RECREATION PROGRAM (Continued)

In the fall of 1953 a joint meeting of the Hazel Park Board of Education and the Ferndale Recreation Advisory Committee was held to discuss plans whereby a summer playground program under the supervision of the Ferndale Recreation Department could be operated at Martin Road School and Wanda Park. As a result of this meeting a playground program was put in operation during the summer of 1954 at Wanda Park and Martin Road School under the direction of the Ferndale Recreation Department.

The history of the Ferndale Recreation Department was compiled with the assistance of Paul L. Best, Mrs. Jeanette Blanchard, Mrs. Lucy Buettner, Mr. Edgar F. Down, Mr. Jay F. Gibbs, Mr. Ervin Kienbaum, Mr. W. A. Laking, Mr. Roy E. Robinson, Mr. Richard Rowley, and David (Bud) Brown.