History of Carl G. Fenner Nature Center

From its Beginnings until 2012

By

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Introduction

The story of Fenner Nature Center is full of interesting events and people. The stories of persons who shaped Fenner reflect dedication, luck, religious faith, coincidence, tragic loss and humor. The place as we know it today is the fruition of the hopes and plans of many people who believed that the best way for one to find meaning in life is to immerse oneself in, and fully appreciate, nature. While not all contributors to the Fenner legacy saw things from the same perspective, they all saw Fenner as a place where people and nature could connect. Not only have many people shaped Fenner, Fenner also has shaped those who worked and volunteered there.

A note on terms used here. To avoid confusion, I have referred to the park as Fenner Nature Center (or its earlier names) and the building as the Visitor Center. This terminology has not always been used by Fenner staff and volunteers.

This history is part of an ongoing story and an effort to show how the place now called Fenner Nature Center has come to play an important role in the lives of the people of greater Lansing.

I served on the Board of the Friends of Fenner Nature Center and its successor, Fenner Conservancy, for over 17 years, including several years as President, including the time of the organization’s transformation into a managing entity for the park. I have used my personal recollections of events and access to all historical documents from Fenner’s past, as well as interviews with many actors in the Fenner story, to create this history.
The Land

The land now occupied by Fenner Nature Center was once covered by an oak and hickory forest. Running along the western edge of the property, extending into Mt. Hope Cemetery, is the Mason esker, a remnant of the Ice Age. Every part of the property has been modified by man since the 1800’s. The land was cleared for farming, artificial ponds and streams were created, and the forest and other plants have reforested the area both by plan and at random. Significant portions of the flora on the property are not native to the area. The park is located in the midst of over 700 acres of green space, counting Evergreen Cemetery to the east, Crego Park to the north, and Mt.Hope Cemetery, Sycamore and Shubel Parks to the west and northwest.

The Turner Connection

The Fenner property was once part of a large farm, called Springdale, which was owned by J.M. Turner, son of one of Lansing’s founding families. (For more on the Turners, see Appendix A). Springdale became famous for its quality herds of Shorthorn cattle and Shropshire sheep as well as stables of Clydesdale horses and Shetland ponies. Every year, these animals won prizes at the Michigan State Fair in Detroit, and attracted well-heeled buyers from around the country to the farm, hoping to purchase prize breeding stock. Turner’s holdings grew to a total of 2200 acres, most of it under cultivation. The farm stretched south of East Michigan Avenue to beyond Forest Road. It was bounded on the west by Mt. Hope Cemetery and extended east to at least the area now occupied by Evergreen Cemetery. A review of an 1895 plat map of Lansing shows nearly 819 acres held in three parcels by J.M. Turner. This was after the Panic of 1893, which led Turner to sell off much of the farm. If you count all the land that would connect the parcels shown on the map, the total reaches approximately 2200 acres.
By the mid 1900s, a third generation Turner, Scott Turner, was the owner of less than 150 acres of the property once occupied by Springdale, and there was no longer an active farm. Apparently, the land had left Turner family hands, but Scott told a reporter that he had special feelings for the place and bought back part of the Springdale property. During his career as a well-respected mining engineer, Turner’s work had required extensive journeys to several areas, including the Western U.S., Central America, Alaska,
the Yukon and Europe. Turner’s travels placed him in danger in 1915, when he boarded the liner Lusitania for a business trip to Russia, where he was intending to meet with the Czar and negotiate the sale of a coal reserve he had developed north of the Arctic Circle. When a German U-boat sank the Lusitania, Turner was thrown into the Atlantic, where he managed to crawl into a lifeboat with 50 others. For hours, people kept fighting to get in the boat, which capsized several times. By dawn five hours later, only 17 people were left alive in the boat, including Turner and a man he had saved from drowning. In the events surrounding the sinking of the liner, Turner suffered a leg injury that bothered him the rest of his life. Nonetheless, he continued his mining explorations. He was especially proud of his discovery of vast deposits of potash in Arizona, allowing the U.S. to cope with the loss of German deposits in WW I. In January 1926 fellow engineer Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, called him to serve as Chief of the U.S. Bureau of Mines, a post he held for nine years.

Turner’s home was Greenwich, Connecticut, but he regularly returned to the Springdale property, where he built a home (and put the Lusitania lifebelt that saved his life over the mantle) and supervised the planting of thousands of trees, including white pines and a maple “sugar bush”. Part of the old farm was transformed into a forest, and Turner, an avid hunter and fisherman, enjoyed hunting pheasants in the grown-over fields near the woods. He did leave an opening in the trees so he could observe his father’s grave marker in Mt. Hope Cemetery from the west side of his home. While this was Turner’s secluded retreat from his job and his East Coast home, many Lansing residents viewed this property as mysterious, hidden behind a cyclone fence and inaccessible to the public.

Photos: Scott Turner’s home in Lansing; the fireplace where he hung his Lusitania life belt (taken just prior to demolition of buildings in mid-1990’s)

In 1952, Scott Turner came to the City of Lansing with an offer. He said that several housing developers had approached him with the intent of purchasing the remaining acres of Springdale. He had a different vision, wherein the land would “remain in its somewhat primitive state.” Even though he had been offered at least $90,000 by developers, he said he would sell 126 acres of the property to the City for $60,000, while keeping his home and an adjacent 10 acres. Moreover, he proposed very generous terms.
to the City: he would accept just $5,000 down, with three years of installments on the balance, and no interest charges.

During the deliberations that ensued, coincidence played a role. It so happened that the head of the city park board was Earnest Gibbs, whose wife was the daughter of one of the Springdale tenant farm laborers who had lived on Mt. Hope years before. Mr. Gibbs became an enthusiastic supporter of the land purchase, as did Lansing Parks Director H. Lee Bancroft. Their support for the Turner proposal was shared by the City Council, who approved the purchase in November 1952, with the stipulation that the property be used as a park. The City of Lansing took possession of the property a month later. All of the purchased property except 6 acres eventually became Fenner Nature Center; the rest was incorporated into what is now Crego Park, across Mt. Hope from Fenner.

Scott Turner lived long enough to see his property turned into a park. He died in July, 1972 at age 92. He is buried beside his father in Mt. Hope Cemetery, where he may still be looking over Fenner Nature Center.

The Early Development Stage – Enacting Carl Fenner’s Vision

After the Turner property became a city possession, there was a long period of slow development during which the land was closed to the public. The mid to late 1950s was a busy time for the Parks Department, leaving the Turner property development as a low priority. Francis Park was upgraded, several playgrounds were added or improved, and development of Gier Park began. The main activities at the Turner property entailed use of the large open areas for hay fields to provide fodder for Potter Park Zoo animals.
In July 1957, Parks Department Superintendent H. Lee Bancroft announced his retirement. His chosen successor was Carl G. Fenner, the longtime manager of the city’s Forestry Department. Fenner was born in Gratiot County in the late 1800’s, the son of German immigrants. He grew up in a log cabin with five siblings, surrounded by a hardwood forest. During his mile and a half walks through the woods to and from school as a child, he came to love trees. He learned hard work on the farm, and once out of school he took various jobs, including those as timber worker, coal miner and tree surgeon. He decided that forestry was his calling, and went to Michigan Agricultural College to learn the field. On the day he graduated in 1923, he went to work for the City of Lansing. Beginning with his years in the Forestry Department, and continuing the rest of his life, he devoted thousands of hours to the study of birds, plants and animals. Unlike many people today, he saw no conflict between the study of science and a deep religious faith. He taught Sunday school classes for many years, even after his retirement. You might fairly characterize him as a missionary for the use of nature as a way to understand God’s plan.

Once Fenner became the City Parks Director, big things began to happen at the Turner property. In January 1958, Fenner stated he wanted to develop a park “with the aim of creating greater interest in the field of nature.” Fenner was inspired by Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois, which was endowed by the founder of the Morton Salt Company. Fenner spent a summer vacation at the Morton facility, gathering ideas. For Lansing, he foresaw Arboretum Park as a place with picnic areas and nature trails “with all types of trees, flowers and shrubs placed in beautiful landscaped settings.” Fenner wanted to have the “homes” of resident wildlife identified by markers, and labels on all the native Michigan plants and trees. Moreover, there would be a visitor center, which,
according to the Lansing State Journal, he expected “to become the center of attraction for Lansing community residents seeking information, instruction and general knowledge concerning landscaping, gardening, forestry, botany and related subjects.” He wanted to develop the park in cooperation with the public schools, to give children educational opportunities “to study nature first hand.”

By late 1958, Parks Department crews had built two miles of roads and over two miles of walking trails, converted an old farm structure into a ranger shed and picnic shelter in the maple grove, built split rail fences, graded a parking area and set up two outdoor toilets. As these developments unfolded, Fenner’s ideas for Arboretum Park continued to expand, and now he wanted to re-create a North American prairie, with a herd of bison, some longhorn cattle and Indian ponies to roam the park.

On August 1, 1959, Arboretum Park opened to the public. There were three walking trails, an entrance road that looped around the ranger shed/picnic shelter, and a driving road that encircled the “alfalfa field” and passed by the “prairie scene.” Much emphasis was given to the fact that this was a nature park. The Lansing State Journal reported that while there would be picnic tables, water and toilets, “there will be no playground, softball diamond or other recreational facilities provided.” The opening day crowd poured into Arboretum Park all day long, with over 11,000 visitors counted. The next day, Fenner reported that there was some minor vandalism, mainly to some labeled plants, as well as a break-in at the “Pioneer Cabin,” a replica log cabin that had been built for Lansing’s Centennial and later placed in the Park.
Photos: “Prairie Scene” with Bison, Longhorn Cattle and Pronghorns; Replica Log Cabin and Prairie Dog Village
Fenner’s ideas were faithfully carried out by the first naturalist at Arboretum Park, Richard Cleeves, an MSU graduate who joined the Parks Department a few years before the park became a reality. A review of his monthly activity reports in 1958 and 1959 reveals a long list of arduous physical activities preparing the property to become a park. He was a very dedicated and hard working individual, with a special interest in birds. This was fortuitous, since from its beginning as a city park, the Arboretum was a favorite place for many birdwatchers. Cleeves began regular birdwalks, as did William Freeman, described by the Lansing State Journal as a “lifelong bird enthusiast” and Michigan Audubon member. Beginning in 1960, MSU Professor Gilbert Mouser led Saturday morning birdwalks, drawn by the large variety of birds, especially warblers. Birdwatchers were pleased when the Lansing Parks Board changed park rules at this time, banning all domestic animals from city parks, whether on leash or not. This change was sparked by the presence of dog packs roaming in Fenner, flushing pheasants and rabbits.
Carl Fenner sent a memo to the Park Board in October 1961, with a paper prepared by Cleeves and Ted Haskell, the City Forester, spelling out Fenner’s goals for the operations of Arboretum Park, which is designed to provide the people of Lansing with a new recreation activity. Other city parks offer ball fields, tennis courts, playgrounds and formal gardens. The nature education programs and facilities of Arboretum Park offer basic values of nature education. This is public recreation in its most basic concept. For centuries man has recognized the recreative powers of calm and contemplation associated with the out-of-doors. The creation and re-creation of a man’s values occur during his leisure time. Arboretum Park...gives the visitor the opportunity to see for himself the bee, the flower and the ripening fruit, to see the three green levels of the forest with birds and insects in their working environment. Each experience adds to his understanding of the “web of life”.... Arboretum Park is designed to help people appreciate nature through greater knowledge, greater awareness, and greater understanding of the world about them.

To reach these goals, the paper noted that the park provides facilities (access roads, trails and picnic areas), “a calm, orderly atmosphere favoring family groups and small gatherings” in a well-maintained and policed place, and accurate information through direct experience, programs and printed materials.

In 1962, after 39 years of serving the City of Lansing, the last five as City Parks Director, Carl Fenner retired and was succeeded by Charles Hayden. Fenner pointed to the development of Arboretum Park as the highlight of his career. At the time of his retirement, the Park contained four bison, 3 pronghorn antelopes, 25 prairie dogs, three white-tailed deer and a pair of Texas longhorn steers in the fenced-in “prairie scene” (but no Indian ponies). In separate cages along park trails, one could see “Sam,” an injured Bald Eagle, a recent arrival (in January), a cage full of wild turkeys, four pairs of quail and two great horned owls. In the woodland pond, there were several species of waterfowl. Earlier that year, the City Council approved $40,000 for the construction of a “nature study building” at the Arboretum, and Fenner had overseen the initiation of that project.

**Fenner Begins to Evolve Under Different Naturalists**

By the time the Visitor Center was completed in October 1963, its cost had grown to $65,000, but the city was proud of its new facility. Thanks to parks expenditures and public appeals for donations by Lansing Parks Director Hayden, the building had displays of Michigan birds, animals, insects and geology, as well as a nature library. The Lansing State Journal reported that Richard Cleeves “designed and built all the displays” at the new Visitor Center. He focused on local flora and fauna, including a Michigan rattle snake. Cleeves was quoted in the Lansing State Journal: “You’d be surprised how much there is right in the Lansing area that people never realize.” Carl Fenner spoke eloquently
at the October 25 dedication ceremony, asserting that the “proper cultivation” of mankind’s physical and aesthetic being leads to the development of “man’s total self,” which in turn gives life meaning. He said “[I]t is our dream that although thousands will rush quickly through this Center and the great outdoor classroom [the park] …, other thousands will, through the years, pause and observe and think, and imagine, and absorb, and embrace the multitudinous secrets of nature made plain – and perhaps come nearer [to] the real meaning of life.”

Also in October 1963, fourteen year-old Bruce Gorsline finished creating a 45’ replica of an 81’ totem he had seen on the Canadian Pacific northwest coast. Using a discarded Board of Water and Light utility pole, Bruce spent five weeks carving the totem, which had 31 faces and 14 figures. He enlisted the help of his family for two more months to paint the totem, which required a sealer coat, five coats of enamel and a clear weatherproof varnish to complete the job. The totem was then erected near the maple grove, where it still stood (in a somewhat deteriorated state) in 2012.
In January 1964, the Lansing community was shocked when Richard Cleeves was killed attempting to break up a fight, while working security in a local bar. He had taken the evening job because his salary as park naturalist was not sufficient to provide for his wife and five children. He was only 38.

Jeff Jackson succeeded Cleeves as naturalist. He initiated the program of tapping maple trees and teaching school children about maple syrup making. He had spent some time on the staff at the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary near Battle Creek, and was particularly interested in managing the woodland pond for waterfowl. He also was keen on having a trail built from the Arboretum to Scott Woods Park, passing through Mt. Hope Cemetery, but this did not happen. Former Fenner naturalist Joan Brigham remembers Jeff as a very talented and capable naturalist, and a good teacher with a strong interest in insects and herpetology besides his bird knowledge. Some City Parks officials were worried about the many poisonous snakes that Jackson kept on display at the visitor center, and when he left Fenner, all poisonous snakes were removed from the building. While most of Jackson’s career after Fenner is not known, he did spend time in Africa.
In 1965, the City decided to honor Carl Fenner for his public service by formally changing the name of the park to Carl G. Fenner Arboretum. Mr. Fenner and his family were very pleased, and in retirement, he continued to keep a very watchful eye on the park.

In 1966, the Lansing Parks Department undertook several changes at Fenner, in response to "human erosion" caused by the overuse of the centrally located picnic area and park roads. The cage for wild turkeys had been abandoned the year before when disease wiped out the flock; it was later torn down. The picnic area was moved from the maple grove to a location closer to Mt. Hope Avenue. Also, the circular drive loop was closed to traffic, which had become too noisy and dusty to be compatible with a peaceful park. The maple grove was then altered into an educational area with wildflower plantings and a fern garden (which soon disappeared). The number of picnic tables was reduced from 73 to 33 during the move; within a few years there were only 9 tables. In addition, construction was begun on a new nature pond in the "prairie" area near Aurelius Road, to be used for fishing and attracting birds. Carl Fenner expressed his displeasure at the changes to the picnic areas, leading Parks Director Hayden to respond to him in writing with the reasons for the changes. Fenner was strongly in favor of maintaining lots of picnic tables, where visitors could sit, relax and contemplate the nature around them.

In 1967, Robert Papenfus became the Fenner naturalist, assisted by Joan Brigham and Cliff Hamilton. Under the very popular Papenfus' watch, the park's attractions included hiking trails, the replica Pioneer Cabin, an Indian garden, two bald eagles, three bison, three antelope, two longhorn steers, caged native mammals, a burrowing owl and a prairie dog colony. Several birds were nursed back to health at the Nature Center, starting in this period. In April 1968, an article in the Lansing State Journal described the trail system and the animals housed in the Nature Center, including frogs, toads, salamanders, and various "small furry creatures" including a three-week-old fox. Also, an observation beehive was in the planning stage.
Papenfus advocated for expanded facilities at the Visitor Center, including a classroom with an adjacent preparatory room for instructors. He studied reservation cards to come up with estimates of student contacts by Fenner staff from 1964 through 1969. Except for a drop in contacts in 1966-67, there was a steady increase in the numbers reached:

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<th>Number of students</th>
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<td>7540</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>11,520</td>
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The reports showed that the heaviest use was by grades K-3, and Papenfus was concerned by the fall-off of attendance for grades 4, 5 and 6. Papenfus also estimated the number of visitors to the park, excluding the school groups:

<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>1966</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>53,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Joan Brigham Years

Fenner Arboretum underwent a major change in 1970, when Robert Papenfus left to become the chief naturalist for the South Carolina State Park system. Joan Brigham, who had been an assistant naturalist for four and a half years, became the Fenner naturalist. She stated her major goal: “It is most important that {children} learn their dependence on, and their interdependence with, their natural environment. Hopefully, we can do this by creating awareness of and sensitivity to, nature through the use of our natural areas.”

Joan’s tenure was a time of constant innovation as she created many programs and events to bring attention to Fenner. She started publishing a Fenner Arboretum newsletter, with poetry, illustrations, information on programs and articles on the environment, recycling, trees, flowers, animals and insects. She also expanded the March maple syrup demonstrations and the fall apple-related activities that by 1973 had evolved into the Apple Butter Festival. For the first few years, the apple butter was made in an iron pot hanging over a fire. Later, a large copper kettle was used, and the apple butter was stirred with a long handled paddle, designed by Brigham’s husband to allow several children to “help” stir the pot. By 1977, Joan told the Lansing State Journal that she would be making apple butter to give away to 3000 school children, in exchange for a 25-cent donation. The previous year, Fenner had raised $300 from donations for apple butter and cider.
During Brigham’s tenure, a steady flow of talented MSU students came to Fenner as volunteers or employees, and she mentored them with the goal of steering them into nature education. These budding naturalists included Barbara Gallup Hinkle, Bill Tefft, Jim Harding, Dennis Fijalkowski and many others who went on to careers in nature education/interpretation. Jim Harding recalled the lively discussion of ideas and different points of view that Brigham sparked, as well as her ability to teach effective presentation skills to her staff and volunteers. Both Harding and Tefft told me that they trace much of their career success to their time spent at Fenner under Brigham’s tutelage.

In 1972, Joan spearheaded the creation of “The Avenue to Discovery,” which the Lansing State Journal described as “the first known Braille trail in Michigan.” The idea came from Haslett Lion Barry Sedgwick, who read about a similar project in Colorado. Joan planned the trail to pass through many types of natural settings, and included exploration through smell and touch. There were 200 cedar posts, strung with 3600 feet of rope (soon replaced by a metal cable), and Braille markers on the posts. This project was opened in October 1972 and operated about ten years, but it was closed down after Joan retired, due to staff shortages and vandalism/maintenance issues. Also in 1972, the first Environmental Expressions Festival was held, where children 5-12 submitted pottery, sculpture, mobiles and drawings to express their views of nature. This festival continued for several years. Joan also implemented an August Thanksgiving Festival (Lammas Day) and Pioneer Days and allowed the park to be used for weddings. She said these
changes were made to “give us greater visibility and a broader base of participation. These events were fun and educational and brought together new groups of people who ultimately became involved in the park.”

Beginning in 1973, and continuing thereafter, Brigham spoke out about several activities that she thought were incompatible with a nature park, including jogging, Frisbee throwing and kite flying. “If you make the park all things to all people, it is nothing to anybody.” She added, “A lot of things here are really contradictory. No other nature center has picnic facilities and penned animals.” One of Brigham’s employees, Ranger Barbara Hinkle, wrote a report to the Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation based on her site visits to six nature centers in south Michigan. She advocated for a change in name for the park, since “Arboretum” implied that Fenner was a botanical preserve, not an environmental education center. She also advocated elimination of all picnic areas, denial of permission for bicycles and running on trails and the end of unscheduled group use of the premises. Another staff member drafted a letter for Joan to send to the Director of Parks and Recreation, noting the increase of “adverse visitor behavior” at the Park, including alcohol and substance abuse, vandalism, “off-trail” activities, cruising, loud music and car washing. Vandalism was especially irritating. For example, in 1971, thieves had broken into the Nature Center to steal a 6’ boa constrictor, a blue racer and a South American lizard. There also were several reoccurrences of vandalism at the Pioneer Cabin.

While Brigham admired Carl Fenner’s energy and ability to move projects into reality, she found it difficult to explain how Fenner’s “prairie scene” animals fitted into a nature park. A special problem was the prairie dogs, which continually escaped onto private property and died of disease. Nonetheless, due to popular demand, new prairie dogs were always purchased to replace the vanished ones. Joan did concede the value of one caged animal, Sam the Bald Eagle. As she explained, Sam “was a great teaching tool. School children loved him. Approaching the cage quietly and hearing the Bald Eagle greeting was a thrill.” This helped her teaching objective of getting children to listen to the natural world. In addition, the story of Sam’s injury and the threat to eagles and other raptors by (then commonly used) DDT offered more opportunities for teaching “what our responsibility was as concerned citizens toward all wildlife.” For these reasons, Joan saw Sam as “a true gift.”

All of the changes in the park did not go unnoticed by Carl Fenner, who became increasingly upset that changes were departing from his original vision for the park. In March 1972, he wrote to Ted Haskell, a fellow forester who was now assistant director of Parks and Recreation, repeating his complaints about the decline of animals in the “prairie scene,” the elimination of the picnic area in the maple grove, the eradication of the wild turkey exhibit and the closure of roads that ran throughout the park. In the fall of 1976, the two long horned cattle died, and they were not replaced. After all three bison died, Carl Fenner organized and funded the largest portion of the $912 cost to transport three young bison from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Nebraska to Fenner Arboretum. (His notes on a copy of a September 1, 1978 letter to the Refuge Manager of the Fort Niobrara NWR indicate that the bison arrived on October 22 of that
year; In addition to a $255 donation from the Lansing State Journal and three individual $100 donations, Fenner paid the rest). There was one bull and two cows, and before long there was a calf, as shown in a May 1982 Lansing State Journal photo by Norris Ingells.

Philosophically, Carl Fenner disagreed with the trends in Fenner operations that moved away from a simple enjoyment of nature (driving by animals, picnicking in the woods, etc) to a focus on nature education. While these trends started with Fenner naturalists Jackson and Papenfus, Fenner was most displeased with the programmatic approach of Joan Brigham. He urged the Parks and Recreation Department’s top management to have a more “hands on, in the field” approach to managing Fenner staff that would bring “lop-sided …enthusiasm to promote nature ‘study’ in preference to nature ‘enjoyment’.” His pointed comments are handwritten in the margins of various policy proposals during the 1970’s and early 1980’s. In January 1983, he lamented in a letter that “The Arboretum has been allowed to deteriorate because of the neglect (due to lack of interest and LOVE of nature) on the part of three Park Dept. Directors who followed me…” Until his death in November 1991, Carl Fenner stayed attentive to developments at the Arb and persistently advocated to Lansing Parks Department leaders for a return to his original plans for the park.

One of Joan Brigham’s most enduring contributions to Fenner Nature Center was her role in the creation of the Friends of Fenner Arboretum. She was concerned that the City was not providing enough support for the park. As early as January 1971, Brigham had started to use her monthly and annual reports to the Parks Department to pressure for more staff at Fenner, and her many innovations increased the need for such staff. She recognized that Fenner had many “friends,” but they were not organized into an effective voice for the park and support for her programs. Thus, she encouraged a core of volunteers to organize.

After nearly two years of planning and activities (including work groups to maintain trails and volunteer staffing of Apple Butter Festival), Friends of the Fenner Arboretum (FOFA) became a legally incorporated entity in January 1980. The first board members were Gordon Spink, Mike Siwek, Mimi Powell, Dave Popkin, Ted Black, Lee Laylin, Bob Bellgowan, Doris Tran and Phoebe Griffen. The stated purpose of the organization was “The support, maintenance and advancement and improvement of the Carl Fenner Arboretum, informational and interpretive programs in connection therewith, and for such other informational and philanthropic purposes and objectives as are in accordance with the policy established by the Park Board of the City of Lansing for the Carl G. Fenner Arboretum.” At the end of the first year in operation, FOFA had $797.73 in a checking account and $1333.56 in passbook savings.

One of the first initiatives taken up by FOFA was the installation of some windows in the Visitor Center. The Center had been built without windows, and this created a rather dark and dreary interior. In 1981, the Friends secured a $1600 grant from the Gannett Foundation to put in windows and began dialogue with the Parks Department over installation issues. Also in 1981, they authorized the $75 purchase of a large copper kettle, in response to an offer from a community member. This kettle became the focal
point for Apple Butter Festival for years thereafter. Another initiative by FOFA was undertaken by Lee Laylin, who announced at the August 1982 Board meeting that she was taking steps to create a gift shop at the Visitor Center.

Photos: Naturalist Jan Brigham shows apple peeling skills; iron kettle for apple butter

After 17 years at Fenner, 12 as chief naturalist, Joan Brigham retired in October 1982. At the large gathering to mark the occasion, she stated her credo: “Man is part of nature, not apart from it.” While Joan was somewhat dismayed at the general public’s lack of environmental knowledge and understanding, she stated that she most enjoyed working with preschool children because they have “no misconceptions about the natural world.” Observing the growth of her own children’s love of nature, which she saw as beneficial to their mental health, she had decided to spend her career trying to foster this in other children. As she told me in a letter, “I believe children learn best in a natural setting where all their senses are stimulated.” She continued to follow developments at Fenner closely from her retirement homes in western Michigan and Florida. She hoped her work stirred some environmental awareness in the people she met. She told me she enjoyed meeting many wonderful people, both children and adults, during her time at Fenner.

During the period after Brigham’s retirement, FOFA stepped up its volunteer efforts to keep things happening at Fenner, including the Maple Syrup Festival. In January 1983, Parks and Recreation Director Douglas Finley posted a hiring notice for the naturalist’s position, stating the “city wants to maintain the level of environmental education and naturalist’s programs conducted by Joan Brigham”.

19
The Clara Bratton Years

In March 1983, Clara Bratton became Fenner naturalist. She had come to Fenner in the early 1970s with her children while she was working on a graduate degree at MSU. She was so taken by the park that she started volunteering, later taking a job as assistant naturalist to Brigham. As naturalist, Bratton was able to engage the Fenner family in support for the park while working to continue the evolution of the park into a Nature Center. Her first meeting as Fenner naturalist with the FOFA Board was in April 1983, which was also Fern Featherly’s first meeting as a Board member. Fern had responded to an announcement of a birdwalk at Fenner in 1974. She was so impressed with Joan Brigham’s birding skills that she started volunteering at Fenner, working on festivals and other things which led her to take the position on the Board, where she went on to establish the record of Fenner Board service at over 22 years.

One of Bratton’s first tasks was participation in plans for updating the Visitor Center and renovating the basement. FOFA President Ted Black and building contractor Carl Haussman had been exchanging correspondence regarding the installation of windows in the Visitor Center. Director of Parks and Recreation Doug Finley commented that the original design of the building did not include windows for reasons of security and maximization of wall space for displays. Both FOFA and Bratton said a change was needed and Haussman’s construction company eventually put in windows to brighten office space and allow views of the parking lot. In 1984, work on the basement began. The space was a barren room with cement block walls and a cement floor, with no heat. For a while in the 1970’s, a large pool was kept in the basement to raise mosquito-eating fish, which were released in the ponds at springtime. The first work was undertaken by high school students under the supervision of Ken Deland; they put up partitions and paneling to create meeting space and an area for event activities. A window was installed to let in more light, as well. In 1985, a stove was added in the corner of the room. Fern and Chuck Featherly and Bratton completed the job in 1986 with the installation of floor tiles. Materials cost and other labor was provided by FOFA.

Bratton worked closely with FOFA to increase support for staffing at Fenner, since the City was reluctant to do so. During the early 1980’s, FOFA contributed over $2000 for staff for summer nature day camps. FOFA also helped build the Apple Butter Festival in the fall and the Maple Syrup Festival in March into very popular events. At the October 1983 Board meeting, FOFA identified several priority needs for Fenner:

- upgrades to the grounds, including lights for the steps leading up to the Visitor Center, new interpretive signage, improved trail system (with parts accessible to persons with disabilities), rail fencing for the maple grove and establishment of a prairie area
- improvements to the Visitor Center, including addition of a heat source and insulation of the basement and bathrooms accessible from outside the building
- upgrades of both staff and programs, including more program leaders and full time security and maintenance staff.
• improved equipment (audio visual equipment and display signs) and supplies for the office and the planned gift shop,

Festivals became the major fundraisers for FOFA, generating income to address these priorities, especially supplies, improvements to the building, birdseed to attract birds, and trees and native plants for landscaping.

In addition to her constructive activities, Bratton had to deal with some difficult events. On March 14, 1983, there was a grass fire at Fenner; fifteen acres were burned, but fortunately, there was no other damage. Another fire swept the grasslands in April 1994, requiring the stout efforts of at least 30 firemen to contain. This fire was probably started by some delinquent youth.

In April, 1983, Ken Deland discovered that vandals had destroyed an Indian wigwam and the frame for a long house, which had been built two years prior by some 20 Native American students. The students had used natural materials (saplings, birch bark and basswood twine) and traditional Native American building techniques. Deland had hoped to finish the lodge and use it as a classroom to teach about Native American heritage.

In November, 1983 the Lansing State Journal reported on the Eagle Scout project of Don Kolp, Jr. He organized a crew to refurbish the amphitheater, which had fallen into disrepair. In addition to the Scouts and their dads, a group of MSU students worked on the project, and donations of lumber and hardware came from several local businesses. Some three years later, in August of 1986, Kolp and his mother Jan complained to the Lansing State Journal that the amphitheater had once again fallen into disrepair. Weeds had taken over the area, vandals had broken several of the benches and there was a fallen limb in the seating area. Parks Director Finley said Kolp had created a project that was “beyond the maintenance philosophy of that park”. Moreover, staff and budget cuts had limited the amount of maintenance that could be done. Finley had expected “a rough amphitheater … There is very little polish in the Arboretum.” There were other issues regarding the use of the area. Aurelius Road had been expanded as part of the I-496 project, greatly increasing the volume and noise of traffic. Mosquitoes were another problem, making the area unusable during the summer months. As a result, the amphitheater was no longer a good place to have presentations. Bratton noted that small groups did use the area in the spring and fall, when mosquitoes are not an issue, and there had been a few weddings there.

In June 1985, the FOFA Board President, Toby Salzman, spurred a new assessment of FOFA’s role at Fenner Arboretum, especially in relation to the functions of the Lansing Parks system and its operations in the park. The Board reached a consensus that FOFA had two main purposes: (1) raising money for educational purposes and improvements to the physical plant and grounds of the park and (2) generating ideas to inspire the City to improve Fenner’s operations. The Board reiterated its support for more program staff, increased security and better signage for the trails. It agreed its most pressing needs were to increase FOFA membership and the active work of volunteers at the park.
Fenner Arboretum Becomes Fenner Nature Center and Expands

In early 1990’s Bratton played major role in the development of a new master plan for Fenner. A site analysis and a vegetation/wildlife inventory were conducted. The facilities were assessed, and it was noted that many were inadequate or in need of repair. A public workshop was held to discuss problems and opportunities for the park. It was determined that “the primary purpose of Fenner Arboretum is to educate people of all ages about the natural environment (particularly native Michigan environments) and the relationship of our culture with nature. Of the two interpretive elements, natural and cultural, clearly the interpretation of the natural environment is most important to the mission of Fenner.” Secondary to nature education are recreational use (hiking, picnicking, camping, birdwatching) and use as undeveloped open space within the city limits. “Given the roles of the park discussed and the assets identified by the site analyses, it became clear that the site functions more as a ‘nature center’ than as an ‘arboretum’”.

The suggestions coming from the workshop were: 1. Restructure and reorganize the trail system to highlight different park features and the environment. 2. Phase out aspects of the park inappropriate for nature education, especially the bison. 3. Develop a new pond by the visitor center. 4. Expand the visitor center, build a deck and add windows. 5. Change the entrance to enhance the visitor experience.

This master plan became the guide for the renovation of Fenner Arboretum, leading to the change in name to Fenner Nature Center. (Accordingly, FOFA became FOFNC, Friends of Fenner Nature Center). A ground breaking ceremony for the project occurred on February 23, 1994. This $450,000 effort was funded by the Michigan Recreational Bond Fund and the 1990 City of Lansing Parks Millage. Bratton worked closely with the designers and construction staff to include features that she thought would improve the park environment and the delivery of services. Even though construction efforts were extensive, programs, including summer nature day programs, continued. Plywood was laid down over mud and rubble so children and staff could access the basement for classes. The work was completed by fall, and on October 7, 1994, there was a dedication ceremony for the renovations to the Visitor Center, which included three large windows for viewing wildlife, enhanced display space for reptiles and amphibians and an area for birds undergoing rehabilitation. A large number of storage cabinets were moved from the main floor to the basement. In addition, there were trail improvements including paved segments to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities, a new pond and deck at the rear of the Visitor Center, new signage and a relocated parking lot. Those speaking at the ceremony were Eric Reickel, Director of Parks and Recreation, Sandy Allen, Lansing City Council, Michael McDonald, Supervisor of Michigan DNR Recreation Grants Division, Lee Laylin, President of Friends of Fenner Arboretum, and Clara Bratton. Bratton stated that many birds and bees had been visiting the new pond, and that landscaping of the pond would be done with native plants.
Photos above; Visitor Center before and after renovations; Below, Clara Bratton enjoying Maple Syrup and Apple Butter Festivals
Just a month before the dedication of the park improvements, Fenner had celebrated the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the park’s opening. Joan Brigham returned to lead nature walks; in addition, there were craft demonstrations, storytelling, music and a cake. Bratton was quoted as saying that budget cuts and changes in program philosophy reduced the number of captive animals at Fenner, now limited to Elvis the bison and Sam the Bald Eagle. She was quick to add that the property still had many wild animals.

While most people accepted and understood the change in the park’s name, John Schneider wrote in a snide LSJ column on June 27, 1994 that he found the change from Fenner Arboretum to Fenner Nature Center “boring”. It is the case that many people in Lansing still refer to Fenner as “the Arb”.

The last major change to the park property came in 1999. On September 28, Lansing City Council voted 6-2 to approve the purchase of 10 acres to add to Fenner Nature Center. The action was the culmination of several years of negotiations between the City and Dr. R.G. Curtis to purchase the last parcel that once belonged to Scott Turner. The City wanted to prevent the property from being developed, since it was completely surrounded by the park. The parcel contained forest, two houses and a dog kennel. The purchase price of $555,000 was $250,000 over the appraised value of the property, but the City was anxious to move forward so it would not lose $278,000 in funding from the Michigan DNR. The City put up $252,000 and the Friends of Fenner Nature Center contributed $25,000 to the purchase.
The Friends set about the business of rebuilding their resources by event revenue, gift shop sales, memberships, donations, and other means. When Lansing State Journal nature writer Norris Ingells, a Board member, died in 2005, the Friends started planning a fitting memorial. The result was the Norris Ingells Walk for Nature, which was held for three years starting in 2007; this event raised money for scholarships and other measures to increase student access to Fenner Nature Center. While the Walk for Nature was discontinued after a few years, the Norris Ingells Fund continues to receive donations so support student access to Fenner programs.

**Fenner Animals**

An iconic animal ignited one of Fenner Arboretum’s biggest controversies in 1990. The resident bison (known variously as Elvis, Mac and Herbie) had come to Fenner in 1978 as a one-year old, along with two cows. Both cows and his offspring calf died, leaving Elvis alone after 1983. Discussions began as early as 1986 within the Parks Department, which included the Potter Park Zoo, regarding the welfare of Elvis, since bison are herd animals. Another issue was the burden on Zoo staff who had to trek over to Fenner to feed Elvis and monitor his health. In 1990, the Zoo proposed to move Elvis to a new exhibit that would include deer, an elk and a moose. Later a proposal emerged to ship Elvis off to a farm at Fife Lake, to join a bison herd there. The latter proposal emerged as part of the Fenner master plan development and was supported by Bratton and the FOFA Board. Controversy erupted as word of this plan became public. On Feb 4, 1990 Lansing State Journal ran an article on Wesley Goins, a Forest Arbor resident who had “adopted” Elvis (who he called “Mac”). Goins paid regular visits to the bison pen, feeding him corn, apples and other fruit. He was upset with Zoo officials who were planning to move the bison. Parks Director Finley responded that Fenner was no longer a family park and was now a nature interpretive park. That meant there was no longer a role for animals like the antelope, bison, prairie dogs and longhorn cattle that formerly resided at Fenner. Finley stated that Elvis should be with other bison. Also, the Zoo tried to regulate the bison’s diet, which was impossible to do when people like Goins kept feeding him treats. Despite Finley’s comments, several other Forest Arbor neighbors supported Goins in his protests. No steps were taken to move Elvis and things quieted down for a few years.

On January 3, 1995, Sally Trout reported in the Lansing State Journal that a farewell party was scheduled for January 14 to see Elvis off to his new home, the 100-acre ranch at Fife Lake, to join 60 other bison. An immediate firestorm of protest arose, focused in the Forest View Neighborhood Association (FVNA). At the City Council meeting, the selection of Tony Benavidez as Council President was overshadowed by an emotional discussion of the fate of Elvis. Doris Maidlow-Kramer, acting President of the FVNA, said that neighbors had become very attached to Elvis during his 15 year residence at Fenner. As the protests continued, Elvis’ departure was postponed. Reportedly, there were deals made in City Council to swap votes for the proposed new baseball park in downtown Lansing in exchange for funds to build a new enclosure for Elvis. Finally, on March 3, Mayor David Hollister announced his decision to keep Elvis at the park, even though a better option would have been to send him away. Hollister cited a promise
some years before by Parks Director Finley that Elvis could stay at Fenner as long as the bison lived. Stating that “keeping your word is the most important thing the government can do,” Hollister said Elvis would stay. There were unresolved issues related to the enclosure of the bison area, which did not meet national standards for bison facilities. The Forest View group said they would raise half of the $40,000 required to build a new fence around the area. In addition to collecting donations, the group put on two fundraising performances of an original play, one at the University Club in June, and another on the Michigan Princess in the fall. City Councilwoman Sandy Allen, a proponent of keeping Elvis at Fenner, had a role in the play. Elvis lived out his last days at Fenner, succumbing in March 2003.

There were some other popular animals that dwelled at Fenner during Bratton’s tenure as naturalist.

- In early 1991, an American Kestrel was found in a distressed state and brought to Fenner. Bratton theorized that he had been raised in captivity, and then released into the wild, where he did not know how to fend for himself. He was very friendly to people. Naming him McAdoo, Bratton decided to have him live at Fenner where he could be an object lesson teaching people to leave birds in the wild. McAdoo lived at Fenner for four years, until May 1995. He was replaced by a young screech owl who spent a brief time as “raptor in residence” at Fenner. Bratton’s actions in regard to McAdoo were consistent with her love of birds, a trait shared by her predecessors at Fenner. She led regularly scheduled birdwalks in the park over the years and was an active bird rehabber. Among her friends were Stevie and Bill Staples. When Bill died in 1998, Bratton collaborated with the Capital Area Audubon Society’s efforts to build a bird blind near the woodland pond, as a commemorative to Bill.

- In September 1994, Fenner gained a new resident, an albino garter snake. It was found near Bath and brought to the nature center.

- Another popular attraction was MacGregor, a black rabbit who resided at Fenner for several years.

- John Schneider’s LSJ column on Feb 23, 1993 reported the February 17 death of Sam the Bald Eagle. Sam arrived at Fenner in January 1962, so he was at least 31 years old, and perhaps in his 40s. He had been caught in a steel trap and suffered frost bite, causing him to lose several talons and part of one wing. He died of old age and his body was shipped to the National Eagle Repository, where his feathers were removed and sent to an American Indian reservation for ceremonial use.
“R.T.” a Ringed Turtle Dove who was found by someone and brought to Fenner, lived in his cage by the bird observation windows for several years. If you waved a feather at him, he filled the room with his “coo, coo, coos”.

Photos: Elvis in the Snow; Sam the Bald Eagle’s Farewell

Honors for Fenner

The efforts of Bratton and FOFA/FOFNC to improve the park, conduct ever more popular events and offer advice and information for visitors and program participants did not go unnoticed. In October 1990, Bratton was recognized by WKAR-TV as an Earth Angel for her environmental preservation work.

In February 1992, the Michigan Recreation and Park Association recognized the Friends of Fenner Arboretum with a Community Service Award, noting the efforts to put on the Maple Syrup and Apple Butter Festivals, as well as volunteer contributions to spruce up days, other maintenance activities, the library, and the gift shop. “Spruce up days” were efforts to eradicate invasive species and maintain the walking trails. The gift shop was started by Lee Laylin, Rosemary Pavlik and Jan Herron in 1985; Laylin also was the driving force behind the creation of the library. Accepting the award were Leona Good, Lee Laylin, Fern Featherly and Clara Bratton.

Fenner Operations Shift to Public/Private Partnership

In late 2007, Clara Bratton announced her decision to retire as Fenner Naturalist at the end of the year. For her entire tenure at the park, Bratton was the only full time employee. That meant that she led programs, nature and bird walks, developed training materials, cleaned up messes, led “spruce up” day work groups, filled the bird feeders, answered all kinds of questions about nature subjects and did a lot of paperwork over the years. There were many days when she was the only staff person in the park.

The City of Lansing announced that, given the fiscal situation of the City, they would not be able to hire another naturalist for the park. The Friends of Fenner Nature Center Board started discussing plans to deal with the situation. They conducted a letter-writing
campaign and testified at budget hearings in an effort to convince the City to reconsider its decision. They based their campaign on the idea that Fenner Nature Center was a valuable City resource which required a City-employed Naturalist to fulfill its role. The City refused to reconsider, but Lansing Parks and Recreation Director Murdock Jemerson began working with the Friends on an alternative plan of action. The City wanted the Friends to take over operations at Fenner, with or without other partners. The City would facilitate, both administratively and financially, the transition to a new arrangement. Bratton was given a consultant’s contract by the City to remain at Fenner until the Friends could arrange a successor. Under the Friends’ direction, a meeting was held on February 3, 2008, “Fenner at the Crossroads,” seeking community input on Fenner’s situation. From that point on, serious negotiations began with the City to establish a Licensing Agreement that would allow the Friends to run programs and manage the facilities at Fenner Nature Center, while the City would provide facility maintenance and utilities as well as financial support for hourly staff. The Friends would be responsible for hiring management and maintaining a schedule of public hours, programs and festivals.

Moving the Friends of Fenner Nature Center from a support group to a program and facility management organization was a major undertaking that produced a serious discussion of mission and philosophy of operations. The Board gradually moved to a consensus that they could take on these new responsibilities. Director Jemerson worked closely with Ron Eggleston, Friends President, to draft a Licensing Agreement that would be acceptable to both parties. Key to the arrangement was the City’s agreement to allow the Friends to keep all revenue generated by activities in the park. This agreement was signed at the beginning of 2009.

Following intense deliberations, the Friends hired Jim and Carol McGrath under contract to act as Fenner’s interim managers, beginning on January 22. The Friends successfully secured a grant for Organizational Development from the local nonprofit collaborative, The Power of We. This grant allowed the Friends to contract with the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) to do an on-site assessment of Fenner operations. Before long, issues of management control and program philosophy began to emerge between the Board and the McGraths, leading to the mutual termination of the management contract in May. Avoiding a shutdown of operations, hourly staff at Fenner, led by Francine Clark and Megan Berry, and assisted by Clara Bratton, were able to offer programs and keep the Visitor Center open.

The Friends Board underwent significant turmoil and turnover during this period. Using the insights provided by the ANCA consultants and their own experiences, the remaining Board members revised the organization’s Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, and developed a set of Policies required for a managing entity. Most importantly, the Board decided to undertake a national search to hire an employee to lead Fenner operations. The result of this process was the hiring of Jason Meyer as Fenner Executive Director in May 2010. Jason had worked with Bratton as an hourly staff naturalist while pursuing his graduate studies at MSU, so he was familiar with the Nature Center. Drawing upon the assistance of Assistant Naturalists Francine Clark and Megan Berry, Jason began an
ambitious campaign of expanding Fenner’s visibility in the community, invigorating the festivals, raising funds for operations and rebuilding the Board. A year later, Program Manager Katie Woodhams was hired. In keeping with the revised responsibilities of the Board, Friends of Fenner Nature Center became Fenner Conservancy in May 2011.

The transition from support group to managing entity was made possible by the countless hours of dedicated thought, work and fundraising by Fenner volunteers, mainly through the Friends of Fenner Arboretum/Friends of Fenner Nature Center. An astounding fact stands out: When the Friends donated $25,000 to the City purchase of the Curtis property in 1999, there was $854.98 left in the Friends checking account (there were some savings in CDs also). Even with many expenditures to supplement City-paid hourly staff and provide Fenner enhancements (birdseed, plantings, furniture, computers, etc), the Friends had accumulated nearly $170,000 when they embarked on their transition to a management organization in 2009. For the next few years, Fenner’s survival was directly due to those financial resources.

**A Concluding Note**

This narrative attempts to describe major events in the creation and evolution of Fenner Nature Center through 2012, featuring some of the key figures in that history. It does not adequately reveal all the contributions of time, money and effort by many Fenner staff and volunteers. Nor does it capture all the good times making quilts for sale, peeling apples, stirring the apple butter pot, drilling holes for maple syrup spigots, having picnics and potlucks, going on birdwalks, putting up holiday decorations and all the other things that make it rewarding to be at Fenner. Most important to the staff and volunteers over the years are the contacts with the visitors to Fenner, especially the children, who found their curiosity spurred, their imagination stretched or their joy expressed at being connected to nature in this special place.
Appendix A: The Turner Family

Early settler James Turner came to Michigan from upstate New York, where he was born in Cazenovia. In a little quirk of history, Cazenovia is adjacent to Fenner Township, which identifies Turners as early settlers there. James became a land agent, charged with surveying and selling off parts of a large parcel of land owned by New York-based land speculator, James Seymour. Turner was called “Big Jim” because of his imposing stature – he was 6’ 4” tall and weighed over 240 pounds. He went into business in Mason, and then moved to Lansing when it was designated as the State Capital. He is credited with building the first frame house in the city, in 1848. He expanded his business interests from mercantile to road and railroad construction. He and a partner built the Lansing and Howell plank road. He served six years as the Deputy State Treasurer, during which time he initiated the building of a railroad from Jackson to Lansing. He also was involved in the construction of a railroad from Ionia to Lansing. In 1866 he was elected to the State Senate, where he promoted legislation that favored the railroad business. With the wealth he accumulated, he built a new Greek Revival-style house on the north side of the Grand River in Lansing, which his daughter and son-in-law Frank Dodge later bought from his widow and remodeled into what is today the Turner-Dodge House. Turner did not have much formal education, but he strongly supported education and was a charter member of the Lansing School Board. He also supported his church and the temperance movement, and was on the mayor-appointed commission that recommended the creation of a public waterworks system (the predecessor of today’s Board of Water and Light). In October, 1869, Big Jim Turner died unexpectedly at the age of 49. His wife, Marian Munroe Turner died in July, 1912, at the age of 91. Newspaper obituaries called her “one of the most beloved residents of the city.”

Turner’s son, James M. Turner, followed in this father’s footsteps in real estate and railroad enterprises. He had a controlling stake in the Ionia & Lansing Railroad, which combined with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. He was also involved with what became the Grand Trunk Railroad and the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad (all the lines mentioned passed through Lansing). James M. also got into politics, winning election as Mayor of Lansing in 1889 and 1895. He ran unsuccessfully for Governor, as a Republican, in 1890. With a partner, he organized the Riverside Brick Company, which was the supplier of brick for the building of the new State Capitol Building (while the exterior is stone, all the interior construction used brick). It was James M. who created Springdale. He did not actually work on the farm, but housed tenant farmers in several houses on the property. One of the tenant houses stood at the corner of Mt. Hope and Aurelius, where the current fire ring, the base of a silo, marks the location of a barn and house. Another house was along Aurelius to the north, and the foundations of that residence can still be found in the park. A third tenant house was along Forest Road, and still stands in a renovated form. A fourth tenant dwelling was razed in 2000 when the Curtis property was prepared for integration into the park.
After James M. Turner died in July 1896, his widow Sophie Porter Scott Turner, fulfilled a longtime wish by having a replica of Mt. Vernon as a home. The home was built on Washington Avenue in the area later occupied by Lansing Community College. Sophie Turner lived in the home until she died in March 1941. After serving as the State Historical Museum for a time, the home was demolished when it became infested with termites.

James M. played a small role in the creation of Lansing’s park system. In addition to creating his farm, he used his wealth to create a nature preserve around his north Lansing mansion. He imported a herd of elk, but they proved difficult to manage at that property. He died before he found a solution to the elk problem. The answer came in the person of timber baron J. Henry Moores, who thought the city should have a public park system. In 1909, Moores gave the city 18 acres along the Grand River (initially called Belvedere Park, it was later named Moores Park) and spurred the creation of a Park and Cemetery Board in 1912. The city hired forester H. Lee Bancroft to run the park system. The Turner family decided to turn the balky elk herd over to the city, and this was the start of a city zoo at Belvedere Park. James Potter, another man who made a large fortune in timber, then gave the city a large tract of land along the Red Cedar for a park. While some people thought this land was “pretty far out in the country,” Bancroft thought it was an ideal place for the zoo. Therefore, in 1920, Potter Park became the zoo’s new location.

Scott Turner, the son of James M. Turner, was born in July, 1880. Early in life he desired to be a mining engineer, but he valued a broad-based education. Consequently, he followed a Liberal Arts curriculum at the University Michigan before he entered Michigan School of Mines (now Michigan Technological University). Scott married Amy Prudden, from the family who ran Motorwheel. (She was related to Ellen Price, who attained some unwanted notoriety by being the murdered wife of the Bath School bomber, Andrew Kehoe). Scott died one day short of his 92nd birthday in July 1972.

Note: At the time of this writing, the definitive history of the Turner family by former Turner-Dodge House curator, Elizabeth Homer, Pioneers, Reformers & Millionaires, was in the final stages of preparation for printing and not available for my research.
Appendix B: Members of Friends of Fenner Arboretum/Nature Center

Board Members and Officers

People began organizing volunteer efforts at Fenner Nature Center in 1978, doing “spruce up” days (which included picking up litter, removal of invasive species and putting wood chips on trails) and helping with Apple Butter Festival. From 1978 to 1980, efforts were made to create a support organization, and the first annual meeting was held February 25, 1980.

The first Board of FOFA was Phoebe Griffin, Lee Laylin, Doris Tran (3 year terms); Ted Black, Kay Hart, Gordon Spink (2 year terms) and Dave Popkin, Mimi Powell, Greg Wortley and Mike Siwek (1 year terms); officers were Gordon Spink, President, Greg Wortley, VP, Kay Hart, Secretary and Mimi Powell, Treasurer.

1980: In October, Donna Maas replaced Mike Siwek and Brenda Wortley replaced Dave Popkin

1981: Kay Hart resigned in January, Brenda Wortley becoming Secretary; Lee Laylin also resigned. Elected at March 15 Annual Meeting: Anita Evans, Paul Flink, Leona Good (replacing Mimi Powell), Donna Maas, Brenda Wortley and Greg Wortley (filling Lee Laylin’s slot). Officers were Greg Wortley, President, Gordon Spink, VP, Phoebe Griffin, Secretary and Anita Evans, Treasurer.

1982: In January, Tran and the Wortleys left, being replaced by Alma Hinkle, Jan Herron and Toby Salzman; Gordon Spink became President until the Annual Meeting, when Leona Good, Ted Black and Gordon Spink were elected to new terms. Officers were Ted Black, President; Jan Herron, VP, Leona Good, Secretary and Anita Evans, Treasurer.

1983: Anita Evans resigned in January and Lee Laylin took her slot on the Board; Paul Flink became Treasurer. Ted Black was President, Leona Good was Secretary. Other Board members: Paul Flink, Gordon Spink, Jan Herron, Marion Fangboner, Donna Maas, Toby Salzman, and (briefly) Alma Hinkle. Fern Featherly replaced Hinkle at the Annual Meeting, where appointees Herron and Fangboner were elected to full terms.

1984: Spink resigned, and Virginia Burns was selected as his replacement. Jon Van Loon elected for a three-year term, and Salzman, Laylin and Flink were re-elected to new terms.

1985: Burns resigned, and was replaced by Sandy Halbrook. Leona Good and Ted Black were elected to new terms. Officers: Toby Salzman, President, Jon Van Loon, VP, Leona Good, Secretary and Paul Flink, Treasurer.

1986: Board attendance and records spotty; same officers as year before. Rosemary Pavlik joined Board some time during the year; Maas and Herron no longer involved
1987: Board expanded to 11 members; Rick Brigham and Bill Cantlon elected; Laylin, Van Loon re-elected. Officers: Leona Good, President, Van Loon, VP, Featherly, Secretary, Laylin, Treasurer. In late 1987, Sandy Halbrook died. Debra Wolf, while not on Board, became newsletter editor.

1988: Board dropped to ten members again. Ted Black, Barb Walkington and Leona Good elected. Officers: Good, President, Bill Cantlon, VP, Featerly, Secretary, Laylin, Treasurer. Van Loon removed from Board for nonattendance late in the year.


1990: Officers remained the same; new terms for Cantlon, Brigham and Laylin. Joanne Foy joins the Board.

1991: Good and Walkington elected to new terms, but Ted Black steps down. After Annual Meeting, Bruce McCrea was appointed to the Board. Officers remained the same.

1992: No new names on the Board. Lee Laylin becomes President, Canlon, VP, Rosemary Pavlik Secretary briefly, then Featherly resumes office; Walkington is Treasurer. Joanne Foy takes a brief leave from Board and is temporarily replaced by Sharon Goble.

1993: Foy returns and is elected to new term along with Cantlon, Laylin and Brigham. Officers remain the same.

1994: New terms for Good, McCrea, Walkington; Board expanded to 12 and Gene Wasserman and Marie Lewis join. Officers remain the same. Late in year, Antaya leaves and is replaced by Joyce Messenger.

1995: Little documentation of Board membership; officers remain the same except for VP, where Leona Good replaces Cantlon.

1996: Laylin, Foy and Brigham elected to new terms; Norris Ingells is appointed after Annual Meeting.

Officers: Leona Good, President, Fern Featherly, VP, Marie Lewis, Secretary and Barb Walkington, Treasurer.

1997: Good, Lewis, McCrea and Walkington elected to new terms. Rick Brigham resigns due to move out of town. Featherly becomes President, with Wasserman as VP, Lewis as Secretary and Walkington as Treasurer. In October, Pavlik resigns from the Board; in November, Ron Eggleston is appointed.
1998: Featherly, Wasserman and Messenger elected to new terms, but Wasserman later resigns, as does Walkington (in October). Carol Miller appointed to Board and becomes VP. Pat Keir and Nan Wrisley also appointed to Board.

1999: Elected to new terms: Eggleston, Foy, Ingells and Wrisley. Lee Laylin steps down from Board and does not seek new term. Featherly continues as President, with Miller as VP, Messenger as Secretary and Marie Lewis as Treasurer. In March, Nia Godbold takes Walkington’s slot on the Board, but Keir and Foy resign.

2000: Carl Ramroth was selected by the Board to replace Joanne Foy, prior to the Annual Meeting, where Leona Good stepped down from the Board and was replaced by Jennifer Good. At the February Board meeting, Rose Zack was selected to fill out Pat Keir’s position on the Board. Officers were selected: Carol Miller, President, Nia Godbold, VP, Joyce Messenger, Secretary and Marie Lewis, Treasurer. (rest of Board: Eggleston, Featherly, Ingells, McCrea, Wrisley). Marie Lewis resigned before the April Board meeting; Eggleston became Treasurer. Julie Feldpausch selected to fill Lewis’ position at June Board meeting.

2001: At the Annual Meeting, Doris Copedge, Joyce Messenger and Carol Miller were elected to three-year terms, with Rose Zack being elected to a two-year term. Fern Featherly stepped down from the Board. Officers were Miller, President; Godbold, VP; Secretary, Feldpausch; Treasurer, Eggleston.

2002: Carl Ramroth leaves Board; Eggleston and Wrisley (3 years) and Zack and Ingells (1 year) elected to new terms on the Board. Jack Sharpe was also elected as a new Board member for a three-year term. Officers remained the same.

2003: At the Annual Meeting, Godbold, Feldpausch and Good were elected to new three-year terms and Zack and Ingells to one year terms. Officers the same. At the April meeting, Bruce McCrea’s resignation was accepted. At September Board meeting, Dani Rouss was selected to fill a Board position.

2004: Carol Miller, Richard Strife and Franni Tourtellot were elected to three-year terms; Ingells and Zack to one-year terms at the Annual Meeting. Messenger stepped down from the Board. Officers were Carol Miller, President; Ron Eggleston VP; Nan Wrisley, Secretary and Julie Feldpausch, Treasurer. In May, Godbolt leaves the Board as she moves out of town. During the year, Tourtellot took over the Secretary duties.

2005: At the Annual Meeting, Fern Featherly and Jack Sharpe were elected to three-year terms; Bob Peebles, Norris Ingells and Rose Zack to one year terms. Nan Wrisley steps down from the Board. Officers: Ron Eggleston, President; Richard Strife, VP; Franni Tourtellot, Secretary and Julie Feldpausch, Treasurer. Rest of the Board: Jennifer Good, Carol Miller, Dani Rouss and Jack Sharpe. Ingells left Board due to illness.

2006: Julie Feldpausch, Jennifer Good and Dani Rouss were elected to new three-year terms; Gene Wasserman returned to the Board with a two-year term and Rose Zack was
elected to a one-year term. Bob Peebles steps down from the Board. Henry Rayn was later appointed to a vacant position on the Board. Same officers continue. Strife and Dani Rouss resign from Board.

2007: At the Annual Meeting, three new persons were elected to the Board: Michelle Jacques, Betty Moore and Judith Rozell. Carol Miller was elected to a new three-year term and Franni Tourtellot to a two-year term. Officers: Eggleston, President; Carol Miller, VP; Tourtellot, Secretary and Feldpausch, Treasurer. The rest of the Board: Featherly, J.Good, Rayn, Sharpe, Wasserman. Wasserman resigned in July. In August, Rozell became Treasurer.

2008: At the Annual Meeting, Jack Sharpe and Fern Featherly stepped down from the Board and Ron Eggleston was elected to a new three-year term. New Board members, also with three-year terms were Judi Miller, Wolfgang Miller and Ron Rosen. Betty Moore left the Board in July because her mother was very ill. Linda White joined the Board in July. Officers the same: Eggleston, Miller, Tourtellot and Rozell, until Rozell resigned in December. Jennifer Olson was appointed as her successor as Treasurer.

2009: Julie Feldpausch and Henry Rayn stepped down from the Board and at the Annual Meeting, the Board was expanded to 13 members with the addition of Jason Almerigi, Kim Brodil, and Wendy Larson. They joined holdovers Eggleston, Jennifer Good, Olson, Jacques, Carol Miller, Wolfgang Miller, Judi Miller, Rosen, Tourtellot and White. New slate of officers: Carol Miller, President; Judi Miller, VP; Jennifer Olson, Treasurer; Franni Tourtellot, Secretary. Amid the turmoil of the McGrath hiring and departure, Jennifer Good, Judi Miller and Wendy Larson resign from the Board.

2010: Following Annual Meeting, remaining Board members are Ron Eggleston, President, Wolfgang Miller VP, Jennifer Olson, Treasurer, Jason Almerigi, Secretary. Amerigi leaves the Board, MC Rothhorn joins for a short time, then leaves. Jason Meyer hired as Fenner Executive Director in May. Eldonna Ruddock joins the Board in December.

2011: Stephanie McKay elected to Board at Annual Meeting; she later resigns; new members appointed are Chong-Anna Canfora, Jack Schmitt, Amy Moore, Paul Beczkiewicz and Dr. Abdalmagid Katranji. Officers are Eggleston, President, Canfora, VP, Olson, Treasurer and Schmidt, Secretary.

2012: Officers are Olson, President, Beczkiewicz, VP, Canfora, Treasurer, Schmidt, Secretary. During the year, Ruddock leaves the Board and Sara Frank-Hepfer, Peggy Roberts, Jennifer Battle, Amy McNamara and Andrea Radel accept appointments to the Board. Radel leaves before the end of the year.
FOFA and FOFNC Board Members and Terms of Service, 1980-2012

Donna Maas (1980-84)  Brenda Wortley (1980-81)  
Jan Herron (1982-85)  Toby Salzman (1982-86)  
Sandy Halbrook (1984-87)  Rosemary Pavlik (1986-97)  
Rick Brigham (1987-97)  Bill Cantlon (1987-94)  
Julie Feldpausch (2000-09)  Jennifer Good (2000-09)  
Doris Copedge (2001-04)  Jack Sharpe (2002-08)  
Dani Rouss (2003-06)  Franni Tourtellot (2004-10)  
Paul Beczkiewicz (2011)  

Fenner Conservancy Board Members (Starting 2011)

Sara Frank-Hepfer (2012- )       Peggy Roberts (2012- )
Appendix C

Highlights from FOFA and FOFNC meeting minutes 1980-2007

NOTE: I have included this appendix to show many actions by individuals, including the various Fenner staff, Board members and other volunteers, that impacted events at Fenner Nature Center. Many of these events did not fit neatly into a narrative about the park, but they provide many insights into the role that volunteers have played at Fenner. I also wanted to put on record the origin of various things, such as the copper kettle used for Apple Butter or the chairs in what we now call the Observation Room.

At the risk of omitting significant efforts (especially by those who were involved before I became a Fenner volunteer) I want to recognize Ted Black, Gordon Spink, Lee and Roger Laylin, Leona Good, Joe and Phyllis Bogle, Fern Featherly, Rosemary Pavlik, Rick Brigham, Joanne Foy, Len Lipinski, Gene Wasserman, Bruce McCrea, Nan Wrisley, Sam Febba, Alan and Cathy Claypool, Grace Hoffer, Marie and Gordon Lewis, Joyce Messenger, Norris Ingells, Betty Moore, Carol Miller, Nia Godbold, Rose Zack, Jennifer Good, Joyce Messinger, Julie Feldpausch, Henry Rayn, Deb Wolfe, Judith Rozell, Frannie Tourtellot, Gair Tourtellot, Rayford Johnson, Kris Reader, Carl Ramroth, Terry Foley, Wolfgang Miller, Mark Ledebruhr and Jennifer Olson. These people have made a difference at Fenner Nature Center.

A meeting was held in September 1978 that began the organization of FOFA. Some of the activities started included trash pickup on the grounds, trail maintenance (chipping, etc). Volunteers were recruited for Lammas Day in August and Apple Butter Festival (ABF) in the fall of 1979. Lee Laylin began working in the library.

FOFA incorporated early 1980, and the Parks Department approved the logo and bylaws in April. At the September 8 meeting of FOFA, there was discussion about developing an audio-visual project to promote The Arb to City Council, schools, service groups and the general public. Even though the City administration had still not approved the bylaws, the Mayor recognized FOFA as a City of Lansing organization in October.

The October 1981 ABF generated over $1900 in revenue. At the November Board meeting, it was announced that the fall spruce up day was “the best ever,” with 168 people showing up to help. At this meeting, there was also discussion of Parks Department budget cuts that reduced the staff at Fenner.

At the Annual Meeting of FOFA in March 1982, the Treasurer reported that there was $163.94 in the checking account and $5448.92 in the savings account.

In a letter to the Parks Department dated May 24, 1982, staffers Jan Derksen and Pat Gillespie complained that Fenner was omitted from the short or long term plans for the Parks and Recreation Department. They cited the staff cuts as signs of City neglect of
Fenner and stated that the City seemed to expect FOFA to “take up the slack” for these cutbacks.

In August, 1982, after several back and forth discussions with the Parks and Recreation Department over design and installation issues, the windows were finally installed in the Visitor Center, overlooking the parking lot. At the August FOFA Board meeting, Lee Laylin stated that she was investigating the creation of a gift shop for the Visitor Center. Between the time of Joan Brigham’s retirement in October 1982 and Clara Bratton’s hiring in early 1983, FOFA helped keep things active at Fenner. The Sugar Bush weekend and school tours leading up to that event went on as usual.

At the April FOFA Board meeting was the first for Clara Bratton as Fenner Naturalist, as well as Fern Featherly’s first as a Board member. Toby Salzman and Jane McCullough announced that they had secured a Mobil grant of $3778 to refurbish the replica Pioneer Cabin and develop a series of eight evening programs focusing on frontier living, under the title of “The Past Comes Alive”. The membership report at this meeting stated that there were 107 members, 39% of whom lived in Lansing and 34% lived in East Lansing. At the August Board meeting, Clara reported that 190 children had attended day camp programs over an 8 week period. FOFA had contributed $600 to pay for extra staff time needed for day camp. Ken Deland reported that his CETA-funded summer youth employment program had resulted in painting, woodchipping of trails, bridge construction and installation of rail fences, along with other projects.

At its May meeting, the FOFA Board allocated $1200 for summer day camp scholarships and supplies, as well as T-shirts for the campers.

In August the Board made plans for celebrating the 25th anniversary of Fenner’s opening to the public on September 23.

During 1984, the Board approved expenditures of nearly $5450 for the upgrade of the basement, including paneling. This work continued into 1985 with additional expenditures for ceiling and floor tiles.

In 1985, the Sugar Bush weekend became known as the Maple Syrup Festival. At the June meeting of the FOFA Board, President Toby Salzman led a discussion of goals for FOFA’s existence as well as the appropriate roles for both FOFA and the City in the Arb’s functions.

In October, the Board discussed the need for more hands-on activities during ABF as well as parking issues for the festival, including the need for a shuttle bus to off-site parking.

In August 1986, the Board discussed an inquiry from the Parks Board regarding the long term plan for Fenner’s bison. Potter Park Zoo did not want to continue maintaining animals at Fenner. Concerns were increased when one bison died recently.
At the October 1986 Board meeting, ABF profits were reported to be around $2200. Bratton also reported serious vandalism at the Park. The Ranger shed was broken into, several new trees in the apple orchard were damaged and a duck blind was destroyed. Park Police (then a separate entity from City Police) were very slow to respond. The Board passed a motion to offer a $250 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone vandalizing Fenner.

In January 1987, the Board voted to purchase a chair rack for the basement. They also discussed the need for a name and logo for the gift shop as well as a logo for the park. Steve Widder, from the Parks and Recreation Department, reported that a request for $17,000 from the Gannett Foundation resulted in a $5000 grant for computers to be installed at Fenner.

In March 1987, the Board considered moving the library into the lecture room and moving the gift shop into the vacated library room. This was done a year later.

In May 1987, the Board met with Jon Veverka, who proposed to develop a master plan for Fenner Arboretum for the sum of $2500. At the June meeting, the Board agreed to pay for the project, with the understanding that it required City of Lansing collaboration.

In May 1988, the Board approved the expenditure of $300 for materials to build adjustable shelving for the library. Roger Laylin agreed to do the labor.

At the January 1989 Board meeting, FOFA’s account balance was $9172, with an additional $1465 in the gift shop account. This included a net profit of $2415 from the fall ABF. The expenditure of $400 was approved for a landscape design by Tom Smith of Grass Roots, Inc.

The April 1989 Board meeting was attended by new Lansing Parks and Recreation Department Director Eric Reickel, who encouraged the group to keep up its volunteer efforts at the park.

In August 1989, the Board approved the purchase of a television and VCR for Fenner, costing $1196. The next month, the Board agreed to purchase 20 pairs of binoculars for Fenner; in November, it was reported that the money allocated allowed the purchase of 27 pairs. The November meeting also heard that ABF drew 3500 attendees, plus 2500 children on school tours before the festival.

At the January 1990 Board meeting, Janet Kolp and Delores Maidlow from the Forest View neighborhood attended to express their opposition to a proposed condo development on the south side of Fenner, along Forest Road. They wanted the City to purchase the land and add it to Fenner. (The project did go ahead later, but with a reduction from 90 to 40 units). Jerry Brady, from Potter Park Zoo, also attended and said he wanted to move the bison to the Zoo, to make it more efficient to care for him. The bison would fit in a planned new exhibit that would also include deer, elk and moose. There were no plans to move Sam the Bald Eagle, who was cared for by Fenner staff.
during the week, with Zoo staff coming over on weekends. Kolp and Maidlow objected to any plans to move the bison. The Board passed a motion supporting the move of the bison if a suitable habitation is prepared. A third guest at the meeting was Ken DeLand, who proposed the construction of an Indian Village at Fenner. There would be a 60’ long house and a wigwam, and orientation tours would be offered to the general public. All labor would be contributed by Native Americans, who would also be responsible for maintenance and repairs. The Board supported this proposal.

In September 1990, the Board approved Bratton’s proposal to spend $1000 on taxidermy services to restore Fenner’s specimens.

In October, the Board learned that the City of Lansing had received a $250,000 grant from the DNR Trust Fund for capital improvements at Fenner. The Board also discussed the desirability of obtaining a first option on the last Turner parcel not incorporated into the park, now occupied by a dog kennel (“the Curtis property”).

At the March 1991 Annual Meeting, the treasurer reported that FOFA had $15,253 in its accounts, including $2186 net proceeds from the previous fall’s ABF.

At the August 1991 Board meeting, Bratton reported that Boy Scouts had replaced split rail fences in the Maple Grove, around Sam the Bald Eagle’s cage, around the old school bell and at the Totem Pole. She also said that Kit Rich would start working 18 hours/week as a naturalist.

Following a report that the ABF netted $2264, the October 1991 Board meeting approved the expenditure of $1000 for library books.

At the January 1992 Board meeting, $1300 was approved for the purchase of six 8’ and two 6’ aluminum tables. Two months later, the Board approved $2000 for a computer and accessories.

In January 1993, there was $14,785 in the FOFA account and $3000 in the gift shop account.

At the February 1994 Annual Meeting, the treasurer reported that items purchased the previous year included a laser printer, bird seed, tree seedlings, a stainless steel sink for the basement, magazine subscriptions and printing of newsletters.

In November 1994, the Board recorded the donation of a Celestron scope from CAAS.

In February 1995, the Board approved the purchase of 4 recycled plastic benches and 10 redwood benches with backs for a total cost of $5166. Later in the year, the Board authorized the purchase of a refrigerator for $828.
In February 1996, the Board, now operating as Friends of Fenner Nature Center, added $3,500 to the City of Lansing’s $4,500 to purchase signs for the corner at Mt. Hope and Aurelius and the Mt. Hope entrance to the park.

At the June 1996 Board meeting, Scout Karl Eckland described his Eagle Scout project to put a fence and drainage around the butterfly garden. The Board supported this project and also approved the expenditure of $500 for the herb garden.

In September, Bratton reported that a 20’x 40’ canopy shelter was purchased. Joe Bogle cut conduit pipes for the poles and roof spanners at an additional materials cost of $136.

At the end of 1996, the treasurer reported that the checking account held $9,246 and there were two $5,000 CDs earning interest.

In March 1997, the Board heard that the net proceeds from the Maple Syrup Festival were $4.36.

In April 1997, the Board’s executive committee met to discuss concerns that the FOFNC files were not being properly updated and maintained. Also discussed was the need to create clear guidelines and definition of responsibilities for Board members serving on committees. At the regular Board meeting on April 24, the agenda included a discussion of the need for a proper paper trail for sales and purchases. Also, the Board urged volunteers to fill out forms to keep track of their hours. This information would be helpful when applying for grants. There were concerns expressed that there were not enough volunteers stepping forward to take on special projects.

At the May 1997 Board meeting, Treasurer Barb Walkington expressed concern that no FOFNC tax forms had been submitted to the IRS for several years. She stated that the organization needed to study the IRS regulations to determine whether we had any outstanding tax obligations.

At the August Board meeting, the purchase of a color printer was authorized.

Ron Eggleston joined the Board at the September 1997 meeting, taking the seat vacated by Rick Brigham, who had moved to Traverse City.

The treasurers report at the February 1998 Annual Meeting listed the assets of FOFNC as $13,156 in checking and $10,573 in CDs.

At the April 1998 Board meeting, Scout James Voges explained his Eagle Scout project to design and install 22 markers for Fenner’s trails. The Board agreed to support this project with $179 for materials. At the next meeting, in May, Scout Kevin Glandon proposed as his Eagle Scout project the rebuilding of the bridge over a small stream east of the Woodland Pond. The Board agreed to contribute $400 for expenses. President Featherly urged the Board to develop a long range plan for the direction of Fenner Nature Center. At the June meeting, several suggestions for long range planning were put forth:
increase the use of visual aids to tell the local environmental story
seek more financial support from local businesses and foundations
update Fenner’s computers
increase Fenner’s visibility via the news, but be wary of park overuse
improve basic maintenance in the park
purchase the dog kennel property
add pit toilet to campground area
secure an aerial map of Fenner and the surrounding area
resolve pond problems, including water levels and excess plant growth
undertake a concerted membership drive
complete the memorial book
tile the hall in the basement
add/upgrade furniture for the main room
maintain and keep current the historic scrapbook
move the pioneer cabin closer to the visitor center and use it for classes on traditional crafts
build a boardwalk through the marsh on the north side of Fenner
add plantings on the north side of the Visitor Center
hold more small events at Fenner
increase Fenner staff

At its September 1998 Board meeting, FOFNC approved the purchase of 12 chairs for the upstairs display room; the Board added $800 in FOFNC funds to a $350 donation from the Miller Road OptiMrs. Club.

At its March 1999 Board meeting, FOFNC agreed to purchase a popcorn machine for its festivals, at a cost of $750. The treasurer reported that the Maple Syrup Festival had a net loss of $68.74, in contrast to a profit from the previous fall’s Apple Butter Festival, which netted $2048.42. The Board also discussed whether the gift shop should be a separate entity or part of FOFNC. At a subsequent Board meeting in November, an amendment to the FOFNC bylaws officially made the gift shop a FOFNC operation.

On September 23, 1999, the Board authorized a $25,000 contribution toward the purchase of the dog kennel property. At the time, the FOFNC checking account held $25,854.98.

At the October Board meeting, the checking account was at $2805.86, including net profits of $2101.21 from Apple Butter Festival. There was also $11,282.38 in CDs.

In March 2000, Murdock Jemerson replaced the retired Eric Reickel as Parks and Recreation Director. Reickel had served since 1989.
At its September 2000 meeting, the Board approved the design of new membership brochures and sent out for bids for printing.

In November, the Board received a report on an Eagle Scout project that involved the replacement of the deck on the west side of the Woodland Pond.

At the January 2001 Board meeting, a representative of the Parks and Recreation Department proposed a Halloween event, “Haunted Forest,” to be held at Fenner. Community groups and Parks staff would provide the displays and volunteers, but FOFNC was being asked to provide an upfront loan to the project to purchase materials. FOFNC would be able to keep all proceeds after expenses were deducted. After raising concerns about protecting Fenner’s wild animals and the habitat, the Board agreed to support the project. Later in the meeting, Bratton reported that all structures had been cleared from the Curtis (dog kennel) parcel, and that Lansing Park Millage funds would be used for a new deck on the east side of the Woodland Pond. The treasurer’s report stated that as of January 1, there was $5278 in the FOFNC checking account, $17,252 in two CDs and $3989 in a savings account.

At the March 2001 Board meeting, approvals were given for the purchase of stationery and letterhead as well as a Gateway computer and accompanying software. Carl Ramroth and Rose Zack had reported their research on computer options prior to the vote. The Board also received a report on gift shop sales for the years 1992 through 2000.

In April, Carl Ramroth reported to the Board that the computer was purchased and set up in the library. He offered to develop a FOFNC website. Bratton said that additions to the fence along Mt. Hope Road were nearly completed. The City planned to clear an area in the Curtis parcel and build a dirt road from Mt. Hope to the scout camping area, with paved parking lot near the street (this did not happen; the lot remained a gravel one). A pit toilet would also be added near the camping area. Bratton also reported that a vandal was girdling mature trees in the park.

At the August 2001 Board meeting, Ron Eggleston reported his findings regarding FOFNC’s tax situation. The organization had not been filing its Form 990 reports as required for a 501(c) 3 organization. He had reconfigured FOFNC expenditure and revenue data over the past five years to conform to the 990 report. He stated that it was necessary to do an annual inventory of the gift shop to gather the appropriate information for the Form 990. The first such inventory was scheduled for January 2002.

In September, Bratton told the Board that vandalism continues to be a problem for the park. The fence along Mt. Hope has been cut open frequently, as soon as repairs are made, new holes are created. Also, all the tube bird feeders save one have been stolen.

At the Annual Meeting in February 2002, the treasurer reported that the checking account had $16,011, with another $4050 in passbook savings, and $18,072 in two CDs. The gift shop checking account held $6703, with $231 in petty cash, $152 in maple syrup inventory and $18,072 in other gift shop inventory. After the Annual Meeting a brief
Board meeting was held to elect officers and authorize the purchase of a maple syrup evaporator at a cost of $750.

At its May meeting, the Board agreed to participate in the “Haunted Forest” event again. The first one had proved quite profitable to Fenner.

In August 2003, the Board agreed again to put up expense money for the “Haunted Forest” event. It also heard a proposed Eagle Scout project presentation by Collin Costello, who planned to reconstruct the scout camp fire pit and install four benches around the pit. The Board agreed to provide funds for expenses.

The October Board meeting featured the authorization of $2280 to be paid to Tom Smith of Grass Roots, Inc. to remove invasive shrubs and trees in the “island” surrounded by the paved roads near the Visitor Center. (This project dragged out over a long time and the contractor was less than cooperative).

The treasurer’s report at the February 2004 Annual Meeting listed $28,705 in checking, $4195 in passbook savings, $26,170 in CDs, $8214 in the gift shop checking account and $16,207 in gift shop inventory.

At its January 2005 meeting, the Board authorized the expenditure of $1250 for taxidermy specimens, including massasaugua rattlesnake, red squirrel and flying squirrel. The results of the previous fall’s “Haunted Forest” were also reported. Due to bad weather, there was a fall-off in attendance, with a resulting low net profit for FOFNC. While the net in 2003 was $3060, the net in 2004 was $1361.

At the March Board meeting, Bratton indicated that tree vandalism continued to be a problem in the park.

An emergency meeting of the Executive Committee on April 9, 2005 resulted in a strong letter to City Council protesting budget cuts that reduced funds for Fenner part time workers by 50%. The budget also eliminated the “Haunted Forest” event. The April 28, Board meeting continued deliberations on actions to be taken in response to the cuts. At the May meeting, there was follow-up discussion of the budget cuts, but no responses had been received from the administration or City Council. Board President Eggleston also reported on a meeting he had with the Forest View Neighborhood Association to discuss their concerns about the use of Fenner as a meeting ground for gay men. He told the FVNA that people wanting to use the park for improper purposes would continue to do so if those who have traditionally used the park stay away. The police have done some regular patrolling, but they do not have the resources to aggressively deal with this issue, since serious crimes are a higher priority.

In June, the Board decided it was a priority to keep the Visitor Center open on weekends, so they authorized the expenditure of $500 to keep hourly workers on site for weekends through Labor Day. In August, the Board extended its commitment to staff through October, adding another expenditure of $1000. President Eggleston announced that he
had initiated discussions with other area nature centers, Eaton County Parks, Ebersole, staff from the Lansing Public Schools and the Ingham Intermediate School District to seek ways for these entities to collaborate on programs, staffing and budget issues.

At the October Board meeting, Bratton reported that the vandalism continues at the park. Several benches have been hacked with an ax or knife and some of the trees in the chestnut grove were damaged. She suggested that the Board investigate the purchase of security cameras.

At the February 2006 Annual Meeting, the assets of FOFNC were reported as follows: there was $26,910 in checking, $5224 in savings, $47,121 in CDs, $16,089 in gift shop inventory and $288 in petty cash. For the first time, FOFNC had over $100,000 in assets.

In March, Bratton suggested that FOFNC should create an endowment fund to support educational programs at Fenner. During the middle of 2006, Board discussed creation of a community walk event to raise money. Kurt Munson of Playmakers was consulted in the process. The result was the Norris Ingells Walk for Nature, which occurred for the first time in October, the morning of the first Saturday of Apple Butter Festival.

Also during the summer of 2006, Matthew Bursley’s Eagle Scout Project built an observation deck for the south portion of the Field Pond. He submitted a request for $1000 to cover materials cost after the project was done. Responding to a Board request, he made a presentation to the Board about his project, after which the Board authorized the expenditure of $856.56 for documented expenses. Another Eagle Scout Project, by Michael Hausinger, removed brush and fencing from the former bison field and planted several native trees and bushes. The Board authorized $200 to cover expenses.

At the end of the fiscal year In January 2007, FOFNC assets had grown to over $111,200. In an “e-vote” following their February meeting, the Board approved an expenditure of up to $1200 for staff time to keep the Visitor Center open on Saturdays and assure adequate staffing for summer nature programs.

Bratton announced to the August 2007 Board meeting that she was exploring the steps she needed to take to retire. At the November Board meeting, she said would retire at the end of the year, but would continue under a consulting contract during 2008 to allow transition to different arrangements for Fenner leadership. The City had indicated it would not continue to fund a naturalist at Fenner.
A Note on Sources

The starting point for the material in this history was the collection of newspaper clippings of articles on Fenner, maintained in the Fenner library. Additionally, I perused the files from past naturalists and staff, including memos, newsletters and letters, including several from Carl Fenner. I also searched through the minutes of the Friends of Fenner Arboretum, Friends of Fenner Nature Center and Fenner Conservancy. I received a letter from Joan Brigham in response to my questions about her tenure at Fenner, and subsequent conversations with her and her sons Rick and David have provided additional information. Interviews with former staff and volunteers conducted 2012 and 2013 by MSU students Maddie Brady and Andrew Marks provided useful information. I also spoke with Jim Harding at MSU and Bill Tefft via telephone in 2013. David Votta, then local history librarian at the Lansing main library of CADL, was very helpful in digging out facts and materials in the Local History room, including several clippings from the Lansing State Journal, and Edna Yost, “Scott Turner” published by the Alumni Association of Michigan Technological University, 1952 (reprint). Liz Homer, former curator at Turner-Dodge House, made some helpful corrections on Turner family history. Additionally, I drew on my 16+ years of experience as a Fenner volunteer and Board member, where I was involved with many of the events described. I also had interactions and conversations over the years with many of the persons mentioned in this narrative.

I also found useful information on the Turner family and Lansing area history in the following:

Ford Stevens Ceasar, The Bicentennial History of Ingham County, Michigan, Shaw Burton, Ann Arbor, MI 1976


J. P. Edmond, Early Lansing History, Franklin DeKleine Co, Lansing MI 1944, authorized reprint by Microfilm-Xerox, Ann Arbor, MI 1959

Helen Jacobson and Jane Wilson, Lansing- A Look at the Past, prepared for St. Paul’s Episcopal Church Heritage Fair, October, 1975

Historic Lansing, Lansing Historic District Study Committee, 1976


There were many photos of activities at Fenner in the Fenner files. Stuart Paterson graciously converted many of the slides to digital format, making them available for this history and use in Power Point presentations.