MiSITES

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 2

MICHIGAN CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

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2020: VOLUME 14, NUMBER 2 MICHIGAN CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings members and friends! I hope you are enjoying this hot and sunny summer. Finally, construction and installations are underway, and we are looking forward to hearing about your projects. Please consider submitting an article to be featured in our quarterly publication.

The MiASLA Executive Committee is pleased to announce our new **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee**. Committee co-chairs Kyle Verseman and Stephanie Onwenu worked tirelessly to create a mission statement, goals, and call for members. The kick-off meeting included a discussion about educational webinars, social events, partnerships, scholarships, and fundraising. On July 30th, the first event titled *Design Justice and Community Engagement* featured a discussion with Charles Cross of University of Detroit Mercy and Alexa Bush, Urban Design Director for the City of Detroit. Additional events will be scheduled, so visit our new web page for more information and resources. Many thanks to Lindsay Fercho for constructing this new online asset. www.michiganasla.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion

We are also interested in providing resources for our Landscape Architecture students who face transition obstacles as the ability to engage with design firms is limited. Please reach out if your firm has remote internships, opportunities for emerging professionals, or advice for job seekers. You can contact any executive committee member to get involved.

Planning for our Michigan ASLA September events are also progressing. Due to health and safety concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic, our in-person conference in Traverse City has been cancelled. While we are disappointed, the Executive Committee is working hard to set up webinars and an LA Ride in Detroit in its place. Please check our website for updates.

The National ASLA 2020 Conference has also been cancelled due to health and safety concerns, but ASLA is working on putting together a virtual program. All Chapter President's Council and Board of Trustee Meetings will also be held virtually.

Lastly, we are looking for volunteers for new and old committees. Feel free to reach out to any Executive Committee for information on our extensive committee list including Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Archiving; Michigan ASLA HALS Chapter Liaison; and Conference Committee.

Thank you to our members, sponsors and supporters for your continued membership support and volunteer efforts. Join the national challenge to make a pledge to promote membership to five firms by October 5, 2020. Your contributions make all the difference in the world.

Joane Slusky, PLA, ASLA
President, Michigan Chapter of ASLA

ON THE COVER:
The Mill at Vicksburg prior to brick restoration and stablization work. Image source: Mark Robinson

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit michiganasla.org for more info or to register!

Sept 18 MiASLA Conference
Traverse City, Michigan
GOING VIRTUAL, STAY TUNED

Oct 3-5 ASLA National Conference
Miami Beach, Florida
GOING VIRTUAL, STAY TUNED

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GOING NATIVE: NATIVE LANDSCAPES AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Wes Landon, PLA, ASLA | NATIVE EDGE, LLC

I love landscape architecture. I love how with the stroke of the pen we can solve problems, create places, and strengthen communities and environments. While sharpening my skills as a student at Michigan State University, my favorite project type was large public plazas and open spaces. Places with energy where people and activities come together – places where excellent design and planning is critical. When it came to plants, I used them less as living components of a greater ecosystem, but more as functional objects to define space, provide shade and scale, and add beauty and interest. Did it really matter if a plant originated in China versus it being native to the region of the proposed project?

Cue 2008, and my dreams of working for a large multidisciplinary firm on the types of grand landscape architecture projects I loved seemed to go up in smoke with the onset of what would be known as the 'Great Recession'. After job hunting for over a year, I reluctantly accepted a job working for an environmental engineering and restoration firm as a 'CAD Technician' and was introduced to a side of our profession I barely knew existed. I began to realize that all plants are not created equal, and incorporating native plants in my designs, versus alien plants, can mean the difference between supporting local ecosystems and building resilient landscapes, or playing an active role in their degradation and destruction.

(Left) A monarch and bumblebee enjoying a Rough Blazing Star (Liatris aspera). Image Source: Wes Landon

Ten years later, I have my own practice, Native Edge, which focuses on blending landscape architecture and restoration ecology principals to create 'complete' landscapes which balances and supports the needs of both people and nature. And the one foundational principal which guides every project is simple, yet so often overlooked in our industry: Use native plants and mimic natural systems.

This article only scratches the surface about the benefits of native plants and the critical role they play in our daily lives. Many of the concepts and examples provided in this article can be found in the book 'Bringing Nature Home' by Doug Tallamy, Professor of Entomology at the University of Delaware. If you are interested in learning more about the concepts in this article, I highly recommend this incredibly informative, entertaining, and inspiring book.

WHY NATIVE PLANTS?

Native plants have many useful functions which has steadily increased their popularity in landscape architecture projects, such as their low-maintenance habits, ability to thrive in green infrastructure practices like rain gardens and bioswales, drought resistance, limited fertilizer or pesticide needs, ability to reduce air pollution, and their stunning natural aesthetic, to name a few. However, the most important aspect of native plants is their ability to promote biodiversity and support local ecosystems across urban and rural habitats.

But why is that? Why is a native plant more beneficial to wildlife than an 'alien' plant? To answer that question, we need to talk about what constitutes a native versus alien plant. Generally, native plants are species which have evolved in a given geographic location with a similar group of flora and fauna over millennia.

In North America this generally means the species which were present prior to European settlement are native. These species developed highly complex and specialized relationships with each other and depend on these same species for survival today. As we continue to develop land and fragment habitats, we are pushing many of our native communities to the brink of extinction, especially since we are re-planting these developed landscapes with alien species and lawn. Also, alien species do not just come from overseas. Native plants have ranges, and it is best to get local genotypes grown from local seed sources, as what is native to southern Ohio is not necessarily native to mid-Michigan.

Alien plants are species which did not originate in the state or even the country in which they are installed. They do not have specialized relationships with the local fauna and therefore do not support local ecosystems. Up to 90 percent of our native phytophagous (feeds on plants) insects are specialists, meaning they only will feed on plants which they share an evolutionary history with. A classic example is the relationship between Monarch and Milkweed (*Asclepias*) species. Monarchs use milkweed for all phases of their lifecycle, from egg to adult, and Monarch caterpillars will only feed on milkweed species. Take away milkweed, and you will lose the Monarchs.

Now you might say again, well, what's the big deal? Sure, it would be sad to lose the Monarchs, but how would it really affect me? To understand the greater effect we need to consider that this is just one, highly popular, example, and that there are thousands of other species which are being pushed to the brink of extinction because we're not planting species which they need to survive. People plant Butterfly Bush (*Buddelia*) to try and help the butterflies, yet not one species of butterfly in North America can use Butterfly Bush as a larval host for their young. Ecosystems and the food web are like a game of Jenga. You can take out a few pieces and it's pretty stable. Take out a few more and it get's

(All images) Venema Native Gardens & Ecosystem Preserve, Calvin University. Native gardens and plaza design by Native Edge, LCC using only native, non-cultivar perennials, shrubs, and trees. Image Source: Wes Landon

pretty wobbly. Take too many out and the whole thing will collapse. The entire food chain depends on the caterpillars and insects which feed on our native plants, as this is the primary way which energy moves up the food chain. For example, chickadees must find 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to rear one clutch of young! No native plants, no caterpillars, no birds. And as the ecosystems collapse, we lose the other wildlife that we love and our own food chain crumbles as pollinators are no longer abundant enough to pollinate our crops.

A NEW HOPE

The time has come for us to turn the page on the landscape practices of the past, which sought to dominate, control, and sterilize the landscape, and embrace ecological landscape principles that will lead us into a healthier, resilient future. And I'm not just talking about rain gardens, bioswales, and the designated 'natural area' out back on the project site – we need native plants and native landscapes everywhere if we hope to restore our environment and create a healthy tomorrow. Landscape architects need to be the stewards of the land that we claim to be, and plant species which are equally as attractive to wildlife as they are to people.

But how? How can we convince our clients to embrace this 'new' style of planting design? Where do we start? I believe this process starts with education. Education for our clients, colleagues, peers, and ourselves. In my experience, when I explain to a prospective client the cascading benefits of native landscapes, both functional and environmental, they can't sign up quick enough. When they discover that they can have a beautiful landscape which also supports local wildlife and saves time and resources, it's an easy choice to make.

However, a native landscape still has to be aesthetically pleasing, have multiple seasons of interest, seasonal color, and good structure, form and texture. Luckily, all of this is very easy to do with native landscapes with a little training. You need to understand the plants and how they want to function in nature. How do they grow? What is their habit? Do they have quality year-round form or do they fade away in late summer? These questions and more will help you


MA 3
MA 2
MA 3
MA 2
MA 4
MA 1
MA 1
Parking Lot
Sidewalk

develop a keen understanding of the native plant palette at your disposal and how to utilize them in your designs. You need to know where to source them, how to plant them in 'communities' versus straight lines in a sea of mulch. Native landscapes have plant layers and plants are installed much more tightly than in traditional landscapes (8-12" on center) so they can grow together, intermingle, and form communities which function much more like a natural system than an alien landscape.

When looking for inspiration in this process, we look to examples from the New Perennial Movement, and no designer embodies and understands this philosophy better than Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf. Piet does not focus on native plants specifically; however, he does plant in a highly naturalistic way which mimics a stylized natural community. His work will help you visualize this new style of planting and how it contrasts with traditional landscaping. One very popular and well-known example of Piet's work is the 'High Line' in New York City. This is a particularly good example to study, as he does in fact use many native plant species in this design, and it mimics an American prairie aesthetic. This is but one example of the countless ways in which dynamic and captivating places can be created simply by designing with native plants. Imagine how we could transform the public realm if this style of planting became the standard instead of the exception.

Many landscape architects and industry professionals are starting to embrace native landscapes and are realizing the incredible value they will provide to our projects, which gives me great hope. If we embrace this new style of planting, and design for wildlife as well as aesthetics, we could blur the lines between the built and natural environments and start the journey towards living in harmony with nature, instead of simply dominating it. Our future depends on it. •

For more information, contact Wes Landon at Native Edge, LLC.
P: (616) 717-0656 E: wesley@nativedgeco.com W: nativeedgeco.com

(Left and far left) Planting design and drawing key for a native garden at Blandford Nature Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Designed by Native Edge, LLC. To be installed fall 2020. Image Source: Wes Landon

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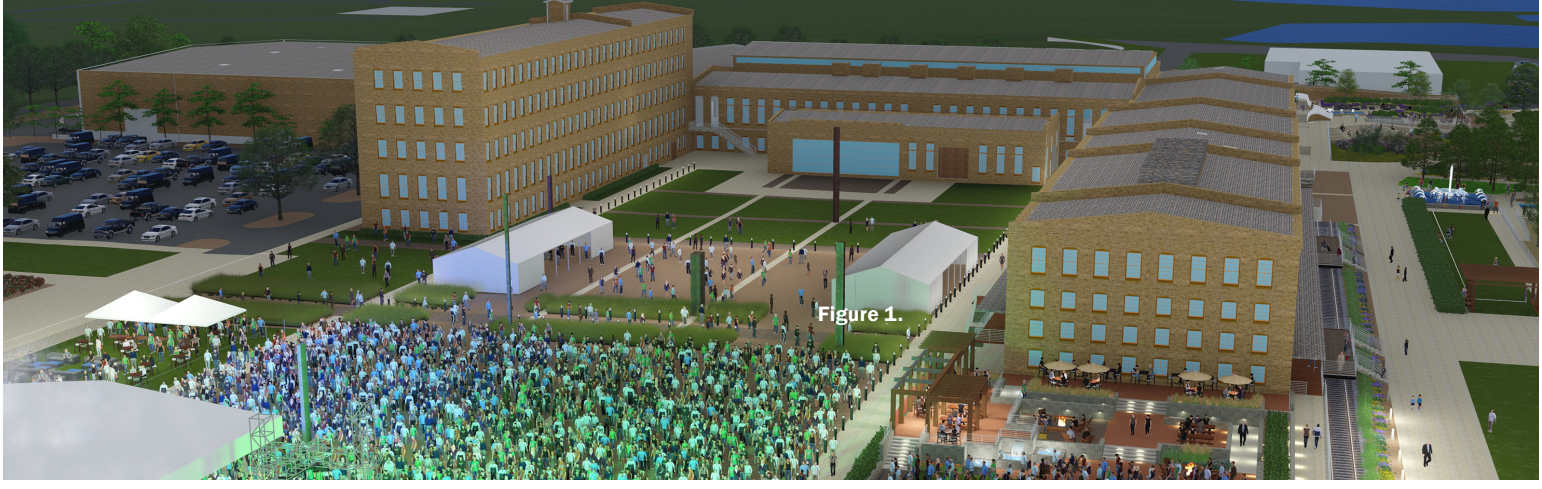


Figure 1.

THE MILL AT VICKSBURG

Mark Robinson, PLA, ASLA | JOHNSON HILL LAND ETHICS STUDIO

The Mill at Vicksburg is a work in progress. Johnson Hill Land Ethics Studio's involvement with the project began in late 2015. After almost five years of sustained, rewarding, and challenging effort, the project is still evolving. Some background about The Mill will set an appropriate context for the work so far and even more interesting work still to come.

The Kalamazoo Valley has been known for manufacturing a multitude of products over the last 150 years including pharmaceuticals, Gibson guitars, Checker cabs – and paper. According to the Kalamazoo Gazette, by 1925, twenty-five mills operating six days a week in the Kalamazoo Valley were producing more book paper than any other place in the world. It was around this time that Kalamazoo started calling itself "Paper City."

The Lee Paper Company was founded in 1903. Construction of the 425,000 square foot Lee Paper Mill, located in Vicksburg, Michigan, began in 1904. This mill would be unique in that it operated as a "rag mill," converting remnants from cotton and textile production into fine paper.

The construction of The Mill resulted in a population boom in Vicksburg. Many of the laborers who built The Mill, and later the workers in The Mill, relocated to the area. In one year, the massive structure was completed. On March 3, 1905, the first mill whistle was blown, signaling the start of production.

The Mill operated for 96 years. Like so many industries during this period, paper making operations were being consolidated and relocated around the world.

(Left) Rendering of a stage location study in the courtyard between the two building wings. Image Source: Mark Robinson

(Right) Bricks were carried in backpacks up the inside of the 200 foot tall smokestack during construction. Image Source: Mark Robinson

Operations ceased and The Mill was permanently closed in 2001. Its concrete, brick masonry, heavy timber, and compartmentalized construction make the building shell inherently sustainable, even by modern standards. Nonetheless, over the next fifteen years, neglect, arson, and exposure to the elements took their toll. It was during this time that Chris Moore learned that the former mill was about to be demolished.

Chris Moore lives in Seattle, Washington, but grew up in Vicksburg. His father and grandfather both worked at The Mill. Chris had heard innumerable stories about The Mill and had extensively explored the wetlands and creek surrounding it. When told that The Mill was about to be demolished, he stepped in and offered to buy the property.

Chris is a successful business entrepreneur but had no experience developing a project such as this. Yet he had a passion for this place. He had seen the vibrancy of the community recede, resulting in significant part from The Mill's decline and closure. He realized he might be able to do something to reverse this trend, but had no clear objectives for how to repurpose The Mill.

The first step taken was to hire HopkinsBurns Design Studio, an architectural firm highly regarded for their work with historic structures. They worked with Chris to identify an initial strategy focusing on stabilization of the structure and its listing on the National Registry of Historic Places. As the scope of the project rapidly expanded, Johnson Hill Land Ethics Studio was selected to provide landscape architectural services.

Our first task was to work closely with HopkinsBurns and the Owner to create a master plan that would serve as the basis for placing the building and the core thirty acres immediately surrounding it on the National Registry of Historic Places. This listing was accomplished in 2016.

The trajectory of the project, however, was only beginning to take shape. An additional eighty acres was added to the project site, along with numerous properties around its perimeter. Out of numerous program objectives initially considered, two started to command attention – beer brewing and music.

The interest in beer brewing has led to an interest in beer gardens. There are currently two incorporated into the current iteration of the master plan. But it is the desire to host music events that has led to the most extensive expansion of planning and design studies. Current plans for outdoor event venues range from accommodating a few hundred people to well over 30,000 people for a major festival. This has led, in turn, to off-site planning for parking large numbers of cars, camping for thousands of people, and commensurate transportation systems.

Throughout these multiple planning processes, our work has continuously focused on how to draw people to The Mill. Unexpected issues, however, frequently emerge. For example, The Mill was set up to receive and ship via railroad cars. There never was a “front door” to The Mill; few doors even open onto surrounding existing grades. Thus, how people move in and out of the building and how indoor and outdoor spaces are linked, especially in light of ADA requirements, became key questions and challenges.

Site design challenges pale, unfortunately, in comparison to environmental contamination issues. The core 30-acre site is a brownfield. The bed of Portage

(Left) Master Plan rendering of the core thirty-acre site.
Image Source: Mark Robinson

Creek and its banks are contaminated. All core site soils will be removed or capped. The contaminated soils of the creek bed will be dredged; the creek banks will have contaminated soils removed or capped. Contaminated waste soils pushed over decades into the creek's floodplain will be peeled back. This is just a short list of proposed environmental remediation actions currently underway or being readied for permitting.

The project, after five years, is still evolving. We, along with the Owner, know exponentially more than we did five years ago. The design work, with each iteration and change in programming or direction, becomes more appropriate by becoming more uniquely satisfying, more feasible, and more cohesively aligned with a wise and efficient investment of financial resources.

The next five years will see significant portions of the building restored and repurposed, the core thirty acres developed as a unique destination and as a distinctive complement to the building, and the completion of substantial environmental remediation efforts and a level of environmental sustainability initiatives rarely undertaken in the State of Michigan. •

(Top right) Rendering of the East Yard at the Upper Terrace. Image Source: Mark Robinson

(Right) Rendering of the East Yard looking back toward the East Wing of the Mill. Image Source: Mark Robinson

CCC BIG BAY — PART II

Recollections of Life in the Big Bay, Michigan Camp of the Civilian Conservation Corps (1935-1936) | JOHN O. SIMONDS

This excerpt was published with permission from the John Ormsbee Simonds Collection, University of Florida. We look forward to bringing you the final chapters from this memoir in the next issue of MiSITES.

(Continued from MiSITES Vol. 14 Iss. 1)

THE BROKEN JAW

The Broken Jaw was old — one of the first saloons and large to suit its original time. The sagging wooden porch under its sagging roof must have been sixty feet in length. It was wide enough to layout a drunk with his head to the wall and still leave several feet for passing. This was tested out on many occasions. The stiffs laid out on one side of the door and the lutefisk stacked on the other. In time the drunks removed themselves or were dragged to the trucks by queasy pals. The lutefisk, however, were stacked from the time of their catching in spring or summer until the holiday season. They were supposedly drying, although passing dogs made a mockery of that. No matter. They would be soaked in lye before consumption. Having sampled this Scandinavian delicacy I would class it less a food than a test of manhood.

Whoever built the log tavern was in such a hurry that they hadn't even bothered to peel the logs, so by now much of the chinking had fallen out and been stuffed with moss — which wasn't much of a help.

The windows were filthy. Few of the panes were unbroken. Some ingenious soul had long ago hung weighted lengths of roller toweling inside the warped casements. This helped, except that if you sat next to a window on a gusty day you were apt to get whipped in the kisser by a row of heavy fishline sinkers. The inside of the tavern was bare except for a long waney-edge maplewood bar worn smooth by thousands of elbows. The slab maple seats had been welded in place by the former builder. Over the years some had been cracked but you soon remembered the cracked ones and left them for strangers. The other tables and chairs were nondescript. Tables were lit at night by a single fat candle in a tin pan which didn't require lantern cleaning or wick trimming. There was this about the Broken Jaw — you could sit there as long as you wanted — hoping someone might come along to buy you a beer. Once in a while they did.

The cobwebs on the ceiling were two feet long and the sawdust on the floor two inches thick. Like most of the town and tavern the bottom layer of the sawdust could contend as a historic monument — since it is doubted that it had been swept out since first laid down. But since it's not a sure bet to hit a brass spittoon from up to 20 feet the floor sometimes needed attention. The attention it got was a scattering of a few shovelfuls of sawdust from the pile outside.

That's about all there was except the three draft barrels of beer on tap with brass cash registers in between. Above were hanging thick glass mugs and shelves full of fancy bottles that seldom got used — as were the dish towels. To wash a mug or glass after use the bartender doused it in the trough of ice water below the counter. That was it.

Never saw the cellar. But one end was where the bartenders lived and the other was where they made their own home brew for sale. It was a depression variety and cheap and was kept in small kegs without aging. If you wanted some, which I never did, you never asked for it, just pointed to it. The mash was all shoved out a door at one end in a heap that attracted the owners' two pigs who would lie awash on their backs with their paws in the air and insouciant smiles on their

snoots. An occasional chicken would stagger around from one foot to another bumping into whatever got in the way — but that was nothing new at the Broken Jaw.

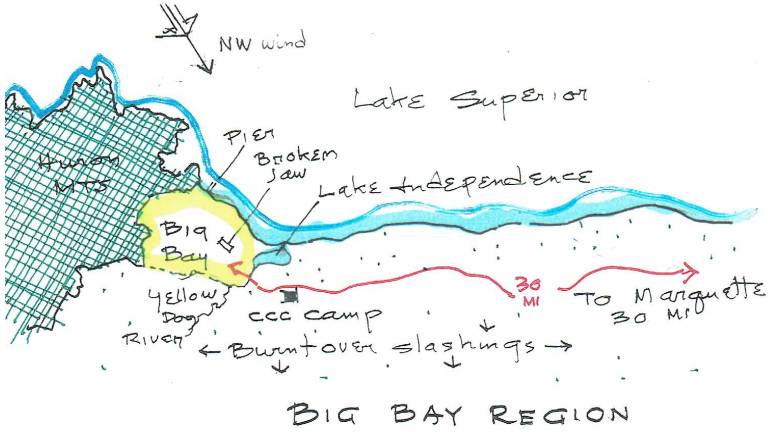
CREW

The first foremen and CCs assembled in the would-be camp were locals — older men who no longer had employment and local youth eager for any work or income. They had come to help set up camp, such as it was — and start to get things in order. They were getting on well together.

My arrival almost coincided with that of a train car load of toughs from off the streets of Detroit and Hamtramck. Most, if not all, were members of gangs. They were brawling when they came and when shown their barracks were battling viciously over choice of bunks. Some had shivs stuck in the sides of their boots and knew how to use them.

Boss Dan Emblad, the six foot six Swede, just locked them all in and told them they could come out and eat when they calmed down. They missed supper altogether. Next morning they filed into messhall for breakfast like a bunch of Presbyterians. After that, in a day or two, the camp was in full swing.

Our work was mainly of three kinds — fire trail cutting, road construction and selective logging. Each CC worked directly under an experienced foreman. The work was tough and new to each crew member but they soon learned to handle at least a small part of the operation well. Once a farmhand or even a city street punk learned to sight a transit, or wield a trowel, or fell a tree without "hanging it up" there was a growing sense of pride in accomplishment. It would have been hard to tell a CC crew from professionals except that the CCs were never allowed to stand around in a circle "jus' yackin'."



(Right) Handdrawn location map of Big Bay CCC by J.O. Simonds. Image Source: John Ormsbee Simonds Collection, University of Florida

ROAD BUILDING

The remarkable feature of CCC roads was their guiding design policy. Normal highway districts were, and are, constantly campaigning for addition funds. Not mainly for road maintenance or improvement but instead to extend and expand the roadway network in response to politically potent land owners and developers. The districts thus become larger and more demanding. Growth (often disruptive) was and is encouraged. One sure result has been disastrous urban sprawl.

In contrast, CCC road construction was directed to rural road repair and improvement — or the building of recreation access ways. On these no building was permitted direct access from the sides. Such developments as might come later were usually well set back and out of sight. These winding trails remain in effect natural parkways allowing the public the enjoyment of otherwise inaccessible camping, hunting, or fishing sites. Surfacing, bridges, walls and signs are all of natural materials and blend into the landscape.

All belong to the forest.

SELECTIVE LOGGING

This unique assignment was under the full control of Sherm Tissue and his experienced crew of old timer lumberjacks. He had been handed a manifest of huge white pine logs, each with detailed specifications for use in the building of large State Park structures. Most would be rafters — some fifty feet or more in length with a twelve inch top.

Where could these possibly be found? They could be found only in remote sites which, because of topography, had been inaccessible to the former loggers with their oxen teams and great pairs of wheels for hauling them out.

Once the CC crew had sighted such a suitable tree or stand the trick was to get a haulway to its side. The great bole would then be dropped, trimmed and left until it could be coaxed out by tractor on the first foot of frozen snow. They were dragged to the head of an icy slide which plunged to the water or railway siding below.

Sometimes the slide could dodge trees and rock and follow a fairly straight line to the bottom. At other times a sharp bend or hook in the slide was necessitated. Here's where Sherm Tissue shone. He would stand at the inside of the bend with his canthook as the log came thundering down. He would spear the butt end with the spike of his cant, flip the hook until it grabbed and bear back with his powerful shoulders. Just as in judo, the force of the log did the work. Turned off course, the rear end lifted to swing around. Sherm finished his pull to twist the canthook free. The log thudded down to follow its new course to its destination. From there, in time, it would be hoisted by ginpole and tackle to a place in the waiting schooner or flat car.

'Never got to see Sherm perform his act. 'Wish I had. Wherever he went he was known for it and admired.

FIRE TRAILS

Fire trails are cut and cleared to provide access to fire-prone areas. In the abandoned, logged-off region of upper Michigan forest fires are annual events. In many cases they serve as the only source of ready cash for those who set them and then volunteer to fight them for a few dollars a day. Nobody blames them. In fact, they are heroes as long as the flames stay down wind of everybody's shack.

The most common method of fire fighting is to get well out ahead of the blaze with a wide enough cut to break the wall of flame. All burnable wood and brush is cleared away and the threatened edge back-fired. The upward draft soon leaves an additional charred burnt-over swath. In time and with luck the blaze burns itself out.

One might think that any access trail for equipment might do, but the location of the centerline involves more factors than a game of chess. My job was to clear the line with an axe and grubhoe, then drive stakes at 100' intervals as guides to the grading equipment and crew to follow. We did this under foreman

Morse who had laid out fire trails all his life and who was constantly appraising the problems, possibilities and alternatives.

First the access way must lead to where fires are most likely to occur. This involves kinds of timber, age, density, and prevailing conditions of growth. The trail at best heads into the wind and follows a moist hollow if possible. Open water is an asset where pumps and spray can be brought within range. Soils must be movable by equipment and by hand tools. The shape of the ground will affect the path of the fire, as will "torch" trees of a kind and height to throw a shower of sparks. A good fireway should not intercept established game trails, or destroy or deface a natural system such as a stand of prime trees, a swamp, stream or lake. So far as possible it should weave through the forest leaving an attractive pathway rather than scar. Then there is the need to protect the most susceptible places and features.

All these considerations and more are basic to fire trail making — but not much on the minds of the crew members on the handles of their saws or throttles of the tractors. A "trail-meister" like Morse must in effect be in his mind fighting fire all the time he is making trail.

PARK JOB

There are good days and bad days. You take them as they come and try to make the best of them. This one was special. I'd been working for a week or more on fire trails when Emblad called me into his office on a Saturday morning. He asked me to sit down, which was good, because I thought you didn't usually fire a man sitting down. Not that I wasn't doing my job, but it had occurred to me that they had one more foreman than they seemed to need — and I was low man on the totem pole.

"How's it going?" Emblad asked.

"O.K.," I replied. "I'm learning a lot." Intending a jocular note I added, "For one thing I've learned there must be something better for a guy to do with his life than pound stakes in the ground."

There was a silent pause. (With Swedes there is often a silent pause.)

"Well," said Emblad, "that's what I want to talk about."

"My God," I thought, "I am fired."
He continued. "There's a State Park in Marquette that shouldn't be there. It's too small and too close in, but it's popular and over-used. It's bordered on two sides by swamp and wilderness. With such possibilities we've decided to try for an in-city State park as a model. It would need a complete overhaul. If interested you could have a truck, crew and equipment — and work out of this camp."

I don't know if a CCC Superintendent ever got "bussed" by a foreman, but he sure came close.

After a week of exploring the site from border to border, a rough plan of revision began to take form. The central feature was a spring-fed lake several hundred feet in length and half that wide. It was replenished by overflow from a wide sunny swamp above that teemed with waterbirds and wildlife. A problem was that over the years its seepage had covered the sandy floor of the lake with a thick bed of black silt. If the lake were desilted, a retention weir would be needed. At the lower lake end a dam and bridge could add lake depth and access to the far side. There was need, too, for a new caretaker's cabin, bath houses, defined camp spaces, picnic facilities and nature trails. Already I had seen a dozen beaver, a bobcat and bear tracks — and there was deep swamp beyond. This assignment, in depression times, was a landscape architect's dream.

In selecting the crew members Emblad had wisely chosen those native to the region and familiar with the woods. There were some twenty to thirty of us from time to time. With our benches and gear, we were a truckload. Heavy equipment was sent as needed.

The first day on the job we had a downpour. Like so many disappointments in life this turned out for the good. With nothing better to do we met with the

caretaker, Bancroft, and his wife in their cabin — the whole crew crowded around the dining table over the existing park maps. We roughed out the new park together in such a way that we all felt we had a stake in the layout. The park belonged to all of us from that day on.

SWIM

If asked if I ever swam in Lake Superior I couldn't honestly tell. But if asked if I had ever been in the lake that I could tell for sure. It happened this way. It was a hot, hot September Sunday afternoon when Sherm Tissue woke me from a nap.

"C' mon, we're goin' swimmin' at the pier," he told me.

"Can't," I replied. "I don't have a (bathing) suit." (Swimming shorts had yet to be conceived.)

"No matter, we all swim in our skivvies." He continued, "Emblad has let us have the loan of his pickup. It's outside and the guys are waiting." It sounded cool, so I piled in. We headed for the old town dock on the other side of Big Bay.

We all agreed, "Last one in is a horse's ass!" To help improve the odds, I pulled a grain sack over my legs and unlaced my boots as we rode along.

We parked some fifty yards short of the rickety landing, and took off for the water to the chorus of, "Last one in is a horse's ...!"

In the lead, I took a flying dive. What I was soon to discover is that Superior must be the coldest lake in Michigan. No, Lake Superior must be the coldest lake in the world. It was like "quick-freeze". By the time surfaced I not only couldn't talk — I couldn't even move.

My friends fished me out with the help of a salmon net and laid me on the planking. When I finally got focussed again the guys were gathered around, laughing. A couple of them had their shirts unbuttoned, but not one had even started to unlace his boots. Numb as I was I realized I'd been suckered — again.

Even in the following winter months if the barracks stove should overheat the room, someone might suggest, "Let's go for a swim!" It would bring down the house.

Author's note: After 60+ years, whenever I hear the term, "horse's ass" (which isn't all that often) I begin to shiver.

TRACTOR

A beautiful day at the Marquette site. Things were going well. Then it happened. The lake had been drained and a thick layer of sediment scooped off to the sides and shaped into a setting of interweaving mounds that would support the weir at one end and bridge/dam at the other. The lake basin was trimmed to a thick section of compacted sand and gravel that must have reached six to eight feet in thickness. We should have left it that way but had no way of knowing what was underneath. In trying for another foot or two, the tractor broke through in to the deep primeval bog that underlay our swampy valley. We tried frantically to shore it up with plank, but plank and all sank into the ooze and slowly bubbled over. There was no time to rig a cable and grab float even if we had thought of it. The bubbles just kept coming.

What to do?

We could well imagine what Walt Meskit would have to say back at the equipment shed but he was too stunned to talk — at least in English.

Next morning, in Marquette, seated across the desk from big boss Gardipee I seemed to have the same problem. Scott, the tractor driver, was with me.

Finally, I managed to blurt out, "Sir, we lost our D/8."

"Congratulations," said Gardipee, "A D/8 tractor must weigh over six tons. That shouldn't be easy.

He asked what happened and took full notes. There followed a long pause. Then he folded his hands to a point at his chin and said, “Thank God, Scott, it didn’t roll on you, or catch your jacket and pull you under. You did just right.”

That was it.

We thanked him profusely and took our leave. He called me back. “You now,” he told me, thinking of the tractor and its size — “you many have set some kind of record.”

FISH FRY

In order to desilt the lake we had first to drain it. To divert the freshwater overflow from the swamp above, we dug an interception trench to carry the water around. This worked well except that the area beaver colony decided that the water belonged in the lake — so at night, until we posted guard, they cut slots in the channel walls. Finally, with the source cut off the water level lowered, but not fast enough.

I met with the Conservation officials in Marquette and borrowed two Fairbanks-Morse pumps. These were so effective that soon only several feet of water remained. To our surprise this swarmed with brook and rainbow trout. What we should have done, of course, was to net them and release them into the outflow stream below. I went back to borrow nets, but as the nets bellied out with record-size rainbow we decided to partake of the bounty. We held back a selected netful and invited the Big Bay cooks (together with pans, bread and a block of butter) to meet our crew next night at the park site. It was a beautiful warm moonlit night as we built cooking fires, cleaned fish and shared a whole case of beer that had been cooling all day in the stream.

As we were passing tins of delectable broiled (illicit) fish around we saw two headlights bobbing along the entrance road toward us. When the car hauled up, who should step out but Dave Nason, the chief conservation of the region. He had come to check on the pumps. What he faced was the biggest batch of poachers he had ever seen in one place or probably ever would again.

Not knowing how to start a meaningful conversation, I simply invited him to “pull up a chair.” He thought awhile and then sat down to lean back against the sandbank. I handed him a beer which he accepted. Next we gave him a pan of the best, crispest, freshest, most delicious trout he had ever eaten. When he finished he remarked on how good it was and asked for more.

The subject of fish or fishing was never mentioned. We talked for a while about things in general. Then he thanked us, got in his car, and drove off. •

(Below) Group shot of the park crew. Image Source: John Ormsbee Simonds Collection, University of Florida

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