

West Bend's Boys of Summer

The Story of West Bend Baseball & Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field

By Catharine M. Lawton

Baseball is America's favorite past time, and baseball at Regner Park is certainly a favorite West Bend past time. Since its first dedication more than 70 years ago on July 2, 1939, the hard ball baseball diamond at Henry O. Regner Park has been the summer home to thousands of boys who learned and played the game, the men that taught and coached them, as well as the fans that have watched from the shelter of the historic grandstand.

Numerous baseball teams have also called the baseball diamond at Regner Park home, including the Land O' Lakes teams—the West Bend Lithias (c. 1936 – 1990)/ West Bend Stars (1991 – 1994)/West Bend Barons (1996 - 2006); Barton (c. 1934 – 1988)/West Bend Company/West Bend 7-up (1989 – present); and West Bend Benders (c. 1926 - present), as well as the West Bend H.S. teams, West Bend Little League, and others.

Nearly 50 years later, on July 25, 1987, the baseball diamond at Regner Park was dedicated as Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field at Regner Park to celebrate, honor and remember one of those men—Carl M. Kuss, the outstanding West Bend H.S. teacher, athletic director, coach and mentor of many, many boys over 20 years from 1946 to his death in June 1966.

Today, nearly 25 years later, we are gathered together once again to celebrate, honor and remember Carl M. Kuss and a few more of the many men that helped build West Bend's fine baseball tradition.

West Bend is known as a baseball town. In many respects, West Bend's baseball tradition has its roots in the baseball diamond at Regner Park, where a new era in West Bend baseball began with the field's dedication in 1939. While other baseball fields came and went, the field at Regner Park has endured; and, time has shown that none has ever matched the beauty, tradition and history of the field we know as Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field. As such, it is only fitting that on this very special occasion we write down some of the history and tradition of this historic and storied field so that all future generations may know what came before.

I. Baseball's Early Days in West Bend

We will likely never know with certainty when the first baseball game was played in West Bend—because boys gathering in open fields to play “Base Ball” was not “news.” Old newspapers prove that baseball was well established in West Bend by the late-1870s, years before the City of West Bend was incorporated in 1885. One of the earliest mentions of baseball in a local newspaper is a note “To the Editors” penned by a ball player that appeared in the June 19, 1878 edition of the *West Bend Democrat*.

THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE.

The Farmington Ball Tossers
Challenge the County.

—To the Editors.

Seemingly there is at present a lull in base ball playing all over the county, (also in this vicinity in the doctor business). Thinking a revival necessary in both branches of the art, the ball tossers of Farmington and vicinity have concluded to make a break, and have reorganized the old "Ploughboy club," which reorganization took place three weeks ago, under the resumption of a new name, that of the "Excelsiors," of Farmington, and now numbering about twenty-six members, "all husky boys," always ready to accept a challenge from any respectable base ball club in the county, to try their skill on the battle field for the championship.

And now ye ball tossers of West Bend, get up in rank and file, and let's hear from you in the way of a challenge. The "Excelsiors" will always be ready to accept it, and always ready to learn or teach a lesson in the base ball arts. Also an invitation from the boys of the Five Corners would be acceptable in the way of a friendly game, or in the way of a challenge on the aforesaid championship of the county. Address all communications to secretary base ball club, Young America, Wis., Yours, BALL PLAYER.

Back at that time, baseball players also doubled as sports reporters. On August 28, 1878, the *West Bend Democrat* published a brief account of an August 17, 1878 "Base Ball match played between the 'Excelsiors' of Farmington, and the 'Riversides' of Fredonia," that was submitted by a "Ball Player."

The newspaper was also used to line up baseball games. On September 11, 1878, the County Fair organizers issued this invitation that was also published in the *West Bend Democrat*: "Will the several ball tossers of the county championship at the coming fair? The society will offer a premium, should any clubs desire to contest, and the secretaries of the several organizations should notify Mr. Jno. Pick, at once, if they intend to compete." This appears to be the precursor to the Washington County Championship Baseball Tournament that was played at the Washington County Fairgrounds during the County Fair.¹

¹ "West Bend, Barton Teams Reach Finals," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 16, 1931, Section C, p. 5.

In 1879, baseball coverage in the *West Bend Democrat* increased significantly. On April 30, 1879, the *West Bend Democrat* noted that “the young ladies have caught the fever and have taken to playing ba’l for recreation,” and published the West Bend High School’s own challenge to “West Bend base-ballists”:

High School Hits.

—The Friday afternoon exercises passed off smoothly.
—Wanted—additions to the Physical Geography class.
—The Botany class is prospering in spite of all opposition.
—The young ladies have caught the fever and have taken to playing ba’l for recreation.
—Several of the first grade absent this week.
—Attention! all ye West Bend base-ballists. The High School Nine challenges you to play them next Saturday, on the Fair Grounds. Come out and show your mettle! The game will be call at 2 P. M. if this challenge is accepted.

PUBLIUS.

On June 11, 1879, the *West Bend Democrat* published a detailed account of a June 8, 1879 game between the West Bend “Benders” and the Port Washington “Red Stockings,” which stated, in part: *“The first match game of base ball played in this county this season came off. . . If the enthusiasm over the national game raged high heretofore, the contest on the fair grounds, Sunday, between the ‘West Benders’ and the ‘Red Stockings’ of Port Washington, has sent it up to fever heat and match games and the formation of nines is now the absorbing topic, and a multiplicity of match games will be the consequence.”*

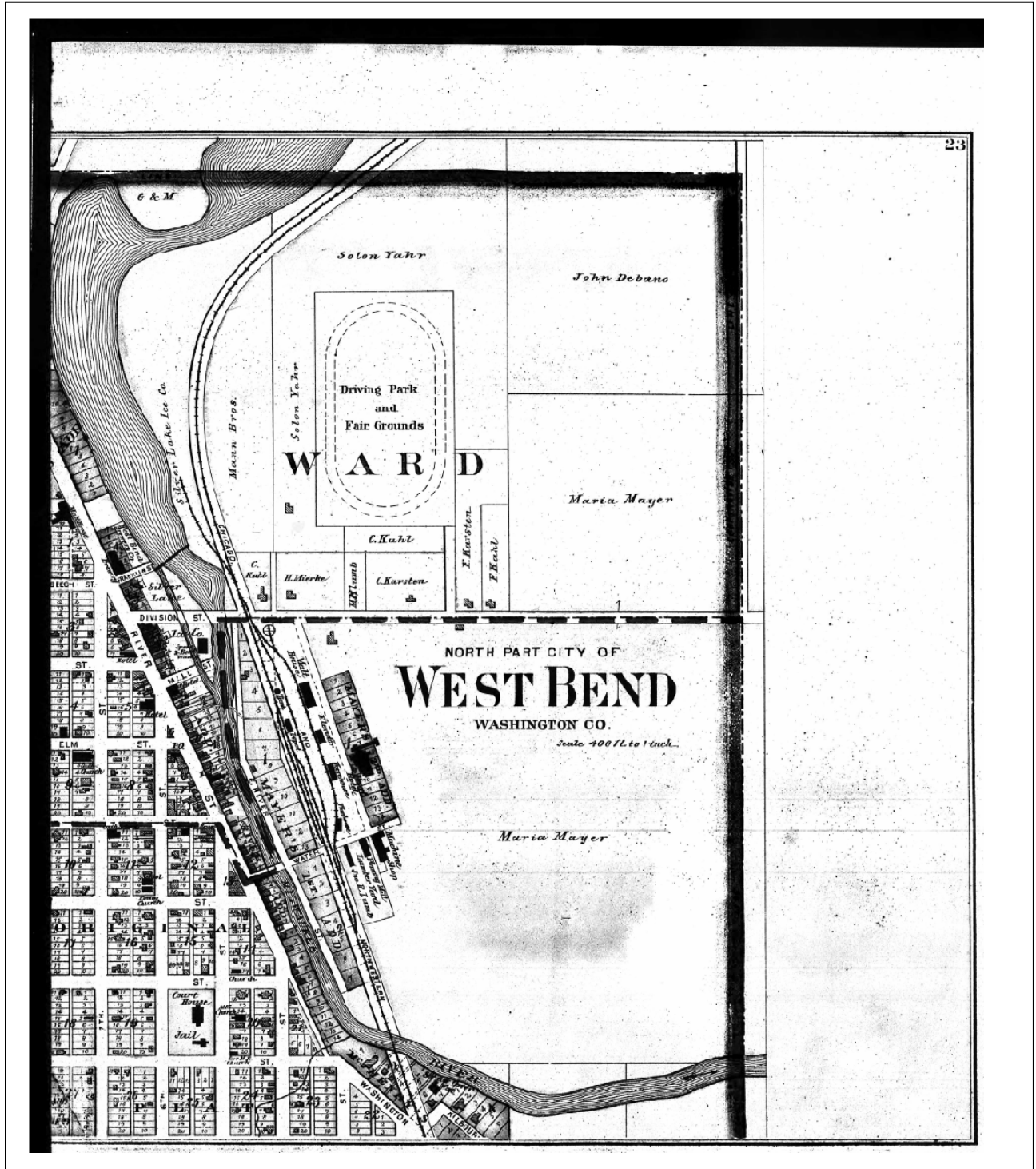
On June 18, 1879, the West Bend “Benders” issued their own challenge that was also published in the *West Bend Democrat*:

A Challenge.

The Bender Boys’ Base Ball Club hereby challenge the Riversides of Waubeka, to play a match game on any Sunday in June, and the Plow-boys of Farmington or the Plow-boys of Trenton, to play on any Saturday in June.

L. A. STANWOOD, President.
ALBERT MAYER, Secretary.

The foregoing clearly shows that baseball was well established in West Bend and surrounding areas by the late-1870s, and at that time, West Bend baseball games were played at the fairgrounds. The following 1892 map shows the location of the fairgrounds—located in the northeastern part of the City of West Bend, west of Fair Park School—however, it does not show the baseball field.



II. The Early West Bend Baseball Diamonds.

The history of West Bend's early baseball diamonds is not known. One of the early baseball fields was located at the County Fairgrounds where baseball games were played by the late-1870s, however, little is known about the baseball fields there. The first Washington County Fair was organized by the Agricultural Society and held in December 1858 in the court house square in West Bend. As the fair grew, a larger, more permanent site was needed. In April 1867, the Agricultural Society acquired 20-acres adjoining the Village of West Bend from Henry J. Weil and Catharine Weil for \$1,500; a half-mile horse racing track was made and two buildings were set up. The site was described in *History of Washington and Ozaukee Counties*, published in 1881, but the baseball field is not mentioned:

It embraces twenty acres, located on the southwest half of the southwest quarter of Section 12. It is on the east side of the river on a high level plat, about three-fourths of a mile northeast from the court house, and overlooking the village on the opposite side of the river. It has a fine track, is inclosed with a close fence, and is fitted with a stand, buildings, booths, stalls and other appointments of first-class fairgrounds. Here the fairs of the society have been held annually, in October of each year since its purchase, "Fair Week," constituting the grand gala season of the farmers each year.

The first fair held on the grounds, occurred on the 1st, 2d and 3d of October 1867, and the speeding of horses was inaugurated, and has ever since been a leading feature of the fair.²

Over time, more land was acquired, and the grounds were constantly being improved.³ In 1912, historian Carl Quickert noted that "at present the race track is being rearranged," and described the county fairgrounds at that time as including the baseball diamond in the northern part of the fairgrounds:

*In September of every year the county fair is held on a tract of land about 25 acres in size in the northeastern part of the city of West Bend. The grounds are elevated and fairly level, and enclosed by a high board fence. The entrance is on the south side. The buildings are on the eastern half of the grounds. They consist of an art gallery, and of buildings for agriculture and horticulture, for poultry, and for hogs and sheep. The middle of the grounds is reserved for the open air exhibition of farm machinery, vehicles of all sorts, etc. Along the south fence, and the west fence almost up to the grand stand, open sheds are running in which the horses and cattle are exhibited. **In the northern part is the baseball diamond with another grand stand.** A dining hall is near the gate. The fine race track is just now being extended. The fair lasts for three days and is visited by close to ten thousand people. Premiums to the amount of about sixteen*

² Carl Quickert, *History of Washington and Ozaukee Counties*, (Western Historical Company, Chicago) 1881, p. 372. Carl Quickert, *Washington County Wisconsin Past and Present, Volume I*, (The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago) 1912, p. 162.

³ Carl Quickert, *Washington County Wisconsin Past and Present, Volume I*, (The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago) 1912, p. 162.

*hundred dollars are awarded. The county fair is interesting and instructive as well as entertaining, and the management always provides for a number of special attractions, like aeronauts, acrobats, etc.*⁴

Images from a June 12, 1910 baseball game at the Fairgrounds between West Bend and Hartford show the baseball field and its small grandstand that existed at that time.⁵ The following image is from a postcard.



Source:
WCHS#015,120

⁴ Carl Quickert, *Washington County Wisconsin Past and Present, Volume I*, (The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago) 1912, pp. 140-141, 162. Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Third Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1936*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 9. (Identifies the fair grounds as 24 acres)

⁵ Washington County Historical Society photographs: June 12, 1910 photos WCHS#015,120; 015,188; 016,113.

By circa 1920, the baseball diamond at the County Fairgrounds had been relocated to the inside of the horse racing track, behind the judging tower. Images that date to circa 1920 show the new location of the baseball diamond, and the east-facing grandstand located on the west side of the grounds.⁶ The picture below is from a circa 1920 postcard. Note the crowd watching a baseball game inside the race track.



Source:
WCHS#015,135

⁶ Washington County Historical Society photographs: c. 1920 photos: WCHS#015,135; 015,136; 015,137. December 1919 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,177, p. 8. January 1928 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,178, p. 11.

In the early 1900s, baseball fields were also located at the schools. Old pictures show the comparatively primitive nature of these old baseball fields.

The picture below is a circa 1910 baseball game in the Village of Kewaskum. The building in the background is the original High School on Main Street and Stark Street.



Source:
WCHS#038,511

The next picture shows the baseball field at the “old” West Bend high school looking west to 6th Ave. and Evergreen. The date of the picture is unknown. Note the primitive backstop. The high school was completed in 1926, however, the baseball field was not completed until some later time.⁷ The 1927 West Bend High School yearbook, *The Bend*, noted: “Because of lack of adequate grounds, no spring work can be done in track or baseball on the school grounds. The boys have to go up to the Fair grounds to get practice, this being the only available place there is. . . Baseball finds a large number of followers, and it is expected that several games will be scheduled with some of the surrounding schools. On completion of the school grounds there will be facilities for football, track, baseball and tennis, and it is expected that these sports will be raised to a high pitch in the activities of the school.”⁸



Source:
WCHS#016,550

For 71 years, from 1867 to 1937, the old Fair Park was the site of harness racing, baseball games, as well as the annual Washington County Fair and other community events.⁹ During the 1920s, the Fair went through hard times; by the late-1920s, the fair was not profitable.¹⁰ In 1938, historian, Carl Quickert, commented: “In the last few years it [the Fair] was only a shadow of its former self.”¹¹ Following the 1937 County Fair, the creditors foreclosed and everything was sold to pay the debts in an October 15, 1937 foreclosure sale.¹² The S.F. Mayer Estate Realty, Inc. composed of heirs of the late S.F. Mayer—including Carl S. Pick, a grandson of S.F.

⁷ 1927 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. ___.

⁸ 1927 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. ___.

⁹ Carl Quickert, “The End of the Old County Fair,” *West Bend News*, June 23, 1938, p. 4.

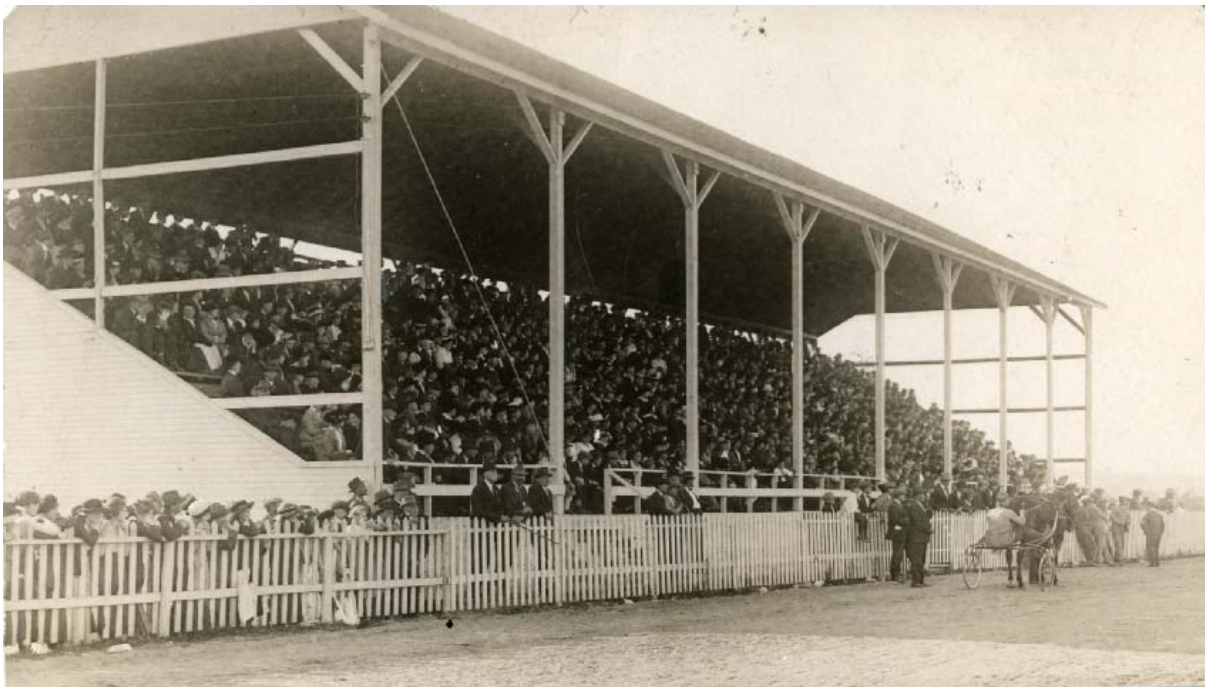
¹⁰ Washington County Fair website: “About Us.”

¹¹ Carl Quickert, “The End of the Old County Fair,” *West Bend News*, June 23, 1938, p. 4.

¹² “1937 Fair Leaves Neat Balance on Hand, Report Shows,” *West Bend News*, December 23, 1937, p. 1.

Mayer —bought the fairgrounds property and offered the buildings for sale with the intention of platting the grounds into city blocks and offering them to the city.¹³ In 1938, the baseball field at the fairgrounds disappeared and the site became the new Fair Park addition which was described as “one of the finest in West Bend;” it contained 120 lots.¹⁴ The lots to the east of Wolcott Street now occupy the ground where the County Fair grandstand once stood.¹⁵ The heirs of the S.F. Mayer estate offered the grandstand at the fairgrounds to the City of West Bend free of charge for the purpose of building grandstands in the new City Park—an offer that the City gratefully accepted on November 8, 1937.¹⁶ Fred C. Schultz offered to dismantle the grandstand at a cost of \$100, which was also accepted by the City.¹⁷

The following picture is from a circa 1920 postcard and shows the large, 120 foot by 24 foot,¹⁸ horse racing grandstand at the old Washington County Fairgrounds, which was later disassembled and used to build the smaller, 108.9 foot by 26.1 foot,¹⁹ grandstand that still stands at Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field today.



Source:
WCHS#015,136

¹³ “Annual Chronology Reveals News Events,” *West Bend News*, January 6, 1938, p. 9. “City Council Accepts Civic Plan Proposal,” *West Bend News*, May 12, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴ Carl Quickert, “The New Fair Park Addition,” *West Bend News*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Washington County Historical Society Records: 1945 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,179, p. 11. January 1928 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,178, p. 11.

¹⁶ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of November 8, 1937 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

¹⁷ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of November 8, 1937 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

¹⁸ Washington County Historical Society Records: December 1919 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,177, p. 8. January 1928 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,178, p. 11.

¹⁹ Grandstand measurements provided by Richard G. Kleinmann, R.L.S., City Surveyor, City of West Bend.

Following the sale of the old Fairgrounds in the fall of 1937, baseball games for the 1938 season were moved to the West Bend H.S. diamond.²⁰ During that season, both the West Bend '9s,' also known as the West Bend "Benders," and the West Bend "Lithia" shared the West Bend H.S. diamond on Sundays.²¹

During 1937 and 1938, a new baseball diamond was being developed at City Park that was expected to be one of the finest in the state.²² The completion of the new diamond was slated for fall 1938, however, delays pushed the completion of the field and its dedication to July 2, 1939.²³

III. The Story of Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field

Building the New Baseball Diamond at City Park

The history of the new baseball diamond in West Bend City Park begins with the history of the park itself. In 1914, Dr. W.J. Wehle, long-time, City of West Bend Health Commissioner from 1907 – 1942,²⁴ and a park enthusiast, identified the need for a city park in West Bend, and discussed his idea with local residents. As early as 1913, he was seeking "information and literature about indoor and outdoor swimming pools" from the City of Baltimore.²⁵ Convinced of the need for a city park, Dr. Wehle approached the city and requested that they consider his idea. The city, however, was apparently not convinced that the people of West Bend needed such a recreational facility, and took no action. Dr. Wehle was not deterred. In 1916, Dr. Wehle organized West Bend Park Association, a stock corporation, for the purpose of providing "the citizens of West Bend, a suitable park in which swimming, skating, and other out door sports may be indulged in, the same to be open to the public upon such conditions as may be determined to be necessary by said corporation."²⁶ As of January 1917, 73 shares had been subscribed in the association at \$5 per share. The shareholders included: B.C. Ziegler, Martin Walter, W. J. Wehle, Carl Pick, A. J. Pick, J. W. Gehl, John Geib, John Hornrig, Jos. M. O'Meara, H.E. Cooley, ___ Day—all 5 shares; Louis Schreiber—4 shares; Jos. F. Huber, M. H. Regner, John F. Cyriacks, Carl Orin Iskert?, C. F. Leins—2 shares; F. W. Lynch, A. H. Heidrier,

²⁰ "Base Ball Under Way in West Bend; Badger League Elects Officers; To Open May 8," *West Bend News*, April 14, 1938, p. 9.

²¹ "West Bend City Nine Will Play Here This Sunday, Memorial Day," *West Bend News*, May 26, 1938, p. 5.

²² "Base Ball Under Way in West Bend; Badger League Elects Officers; To Open May 8," *West Bend News*, April 14, 1938, p. 9.

²³ "Base Ball Under Way in West Bend; Badger League Elects Officers; To Open May 8," *West Bend News*, April 14, 1938, p. 9. "West Bend City Nine Will Play Here This Sunday, Memorial Day," *West Bend News*, May 26, 1938, p. 5.

²⁴ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: Minutes of May 11, 1942 City Council meeting, and Resolution No. 1 of 1942-43 City Council, *1942 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

²⁵ City of West Bend Records: December 24, 1913 letter from Thom. M. Beadenkoff, Secretary, Free Public Bath Commission of the City of Baltimore to W. J. Wehle, M.D.

²⁶ City of West Bend Records: "Subscription List For Stock of Proposed Corporation, to be Known as THE WEST BEND PARK ASSOCIATION," dated December 7, 1916. "Plan is Crystallizing; West Bend Park Association to be Organized Shortly," *West Bend News*, January 17, 1917.

Ed Pick, F. W. Bucklin, Robert H. Rolf, Arig J. Strelela?, Fred I. Schultz, and Benjamin Riesch—all 1 share.²⁷ In addition, Dr. Wehle had secured a 90-day option to purchase five acres of land that was part of the old F.A. Camann farm, for \$750.²⁸ Ironically, the F.A. Camann farm is the same site that eventually became part of the west side of City Park.²⁹ Dr. Wehle's park plans did not involve baseball, but rather proposed the construction of two swimming pools, one under two feet deep for smaller children, and one six feet deep and greater for the larger children and adults.³⁰ Again, the City took no action.

The 1926 election of City of West Bend Mayor Henry O. Regner proved to be a turning point for City Park. In the spring elections in April 1929, a referendum was placed on the ballot that read: "Shall the Common Council of the City of West Bend, Wisconsin, acquire real estate for park purposes at a cost not to exceed the sum of Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00)?"³¹ With the support of Mayor Regner, local residents endorsed the measure.

In early-1930, the City of West Bend took the first step to acquire land for the park. At that time, some of the lots in the proposed Crystal Spring Park Subdivision had been tax delinquent since 1927.³² On February 3, 1930, the Mayor and the Chairman of the Finance Committee were directed to "get in touch with Wm. Goebel, owner of a tract of land adjoining the Proposed Plat of Crystal Springs Park Subdivision, and also with all owners of lots in said proposed plat upon which taxes have been regularly paid, to report to Council as to best prices obtainable for the purchase of said lands."³³ The land was located on the northwestern outskirts of the City of West Bend.

In February 1930, the City of West Bend negotiated an option to purchase the William Goebel land.³⁴ On February 17, 1930, the City of West Bend negotiated a 60-day option for the purchase of approximately 53 lots in the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision owned by Jos. Kleiber for a price of \$1,000.³⁵

On March 31, 1930, the City purchased approximately 31 acres of land known as the Goebel Woods located on the northwest side of West Bend from William and Frieda Goebel,³⁶ which

²⁷ City of West Bend Records: "Subscription List For Stock of Proposed Corporation, to be Known as THE WEST BEND PARK ASSOCIATION," dated December 7, 1916.

²⁸ "Plan is Crystallizing; West Bend Park Association to be Organized Shortly," *West Bend News*, January 17, 1917. City of West Bend Records: Real Estate Option between W. J. Wehle/Chas. F. Leins and Mrs. Herman Jaeger dated December 9, 1916.

²⁹ A circa 1930 plat map shows the F.A. Camann farm as the 80 acres described as east ½ of the southwest ¼ of Section 11, Township 11 north, Range 19 east. The legal description for the 30-acre William Goebel property the City purchased in 1930 is part of the east ½ of the southwest ¼ of Section 11, Township 11 north, Range 19 east.

³⁰ "Plan is Crystallizing; West Bend Park Association to be Organized Shortly," *West Bend News*, January 17, 1917.

³¹ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of March 11, 1929 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

³² City of West Bend Records: July 28, 1932 Record of City of West Bend's acquisition of tax delinquent land.

³³ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of February 3, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

³⁴ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of March 3, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

³⁵ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of February 17, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

³⁶ City of West Bend records: March 31, 1930 Warranty Deed between William Goebel, and Frieda Goebel, his wife, and The City of West Bend. Minutes of March 3, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

became the west side of City Park. The price: \$3,000.³⁷ On April 26, 1930, the City purchased 52 lots in the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park subdivision from Joseph A. and Louisa Kleiber which was the beginning of the east side of City Park. The price: \$1,000.³⁸

Between 1930 and 1937, the City acquired at least 54 additional lots in the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision from numerous parties.³⁹ On July 28, 1932, the City of West Bend acquired at auction 146 of the 302 lots in the proposed Crystal Spring Park Subdivision and certain other adjacent land that were tax delinquent, for a total sum of \$234.20.⁴⁰ By the end of 1937—and 8 years of park land acquisition—the City of West Bend had acquired at least 252 of the 302 lots within the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision.

The circumstances surrounding the City's acquisition of the land for the park was described in a July 14, 1935 *Milwaukee Journal* article:

Low land east of the park was platted and sold to unwary purchasers, many of whom abandoned their lots upon seeing the marsh area that had been sold to them. After the wooded area had been purchased, the city added 15 acres of tax delinquent lowlands, which is now being filled in and upon which baseball diamonds and playgrounds are to be built.⁴¹

The economic turmoil of the Great Depression diverted attention to more pressing matters, and progress on the new park was slow. From 1930 through 1933, the City of West Bend worked on park planning, surveying, and further land acquisition.⁴² On June 5, 1933, the City Council accepted Milwaukee landscape architect, Boerner & Boerner's, proposal to prepare a design plan for the City's park lands and provide other services.⁴³ The plans for the new park were finally completed by Milwaukee landscape architect, Boerner & Boerner, in October 1933. The plans showed a baseball field on the east end of the park grounds. The City planned to devote

³⁷ City of West Bend records: Minutes of March 3, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

³⁸ City of West Bend records: April 26, 1930 Warranty Deed between Joseph A. Kleiber and Louisa Kleiber, his wife, and The City of West Bend. Minutes of February 17, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

³⁹ City of West Bend records: Minutes of February 17, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. City of West Bend records: of October 2, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. City of West Bend records: of December 4, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. City of West Bend records: of January 29, 1934 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. City of West Bend records: of April 30, 1934 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. City of West Bend records: of June 17, 1935 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. City of West Bend records: of June 19, 1935 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. The Third Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the year ending December 31, 1936, p. 13. The Fourth Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the year ending December 31, 1937, p. 10.

⁴⁰ City of West Bend Records: July 28, 1932 Record of City of West Bend's acquisition of tax delinquent land.

⁴¹ "City Park Open at West Bend, Inviting Retreat Speeded to Completion by Relief Funds," *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 14, 1935.

⁴² City of West Bend records: Minutes of March 17, 1930 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. Minutes of October 5, 1931 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. Minutes of May 1, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. Minutes of June 5, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

⁴³ City of West Bend records: Minutes of June 5, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*.

about 20 years to the park's development, and would undertake work as the City could afford to do it.⁴⁴

West Bend's timing was excellent. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the availability of federal money for local projects proved to be the catalyst that caused the City of West Bend to begin the development of City Park. In November 1933, "due to having the plans already and quick action in filing them," the City of West Bend was granted Civil Work Authority (CWA) funding under Project No. 12 for \$40,000 to develop the City Park.⁴⁵ Work on the new park commenced within 1 week.⁴⁶ Before the CWA was disbanded in April 1934, the City of West Bend had expended \$29,000 for labor to grade, excavate a 3-acre lagoon, build a concrete dam across Silver Creek, and remove trees. In addition, the City of West Bend contributed an additional \$7,000 for materials, machines and supervision.⁴⁷

In May 1934, additional federal money administered by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was awarded and funded further work at City Park including lagoon shoreline improvements, tree planting, path and road construction, and the construction of several rustic bridges spanning Silver Creek. Funds, however, soon ran out.⁴⁸ On October 1, 1934, the City of West Bend authorized a \$10,000 bond issue that allowed work at the park to continue.⁴⁹ With the assistance of FERA contract workers, the City funded the construction of a bandstand, bath house and recreational building, and a refreshment stand and restrooms made of lannon stone in 1935.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ "City Park Open at West Bend, Inviting Retreat Speeded to Completion by Relief Funds," *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 14, 1935.

⁴⁵ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of November 24, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, p. 9. "City Park Open at West Bend, Inviting Retreat Speeded to Completion by Relief Funds," *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 14, 1935.

⁴⁶ "City Park Open at West Bend, Inviting Retreat Speeded to Completion by Relief Funds," *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 14, 1935.

⁴⁷ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of November 24, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Peter A. Rathbun, David W. Vannoy, and Mary Yeater Rathbun, "Final Report of an Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey of West Bend, Wisconsin," March 1988, pp. 156-57. Washington County Historical Society Records: *The First Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1934*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 21.

⁴⁹ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of October 1, 1934 City Council meeting, and Resolution No. 6, *Council Proceedings, Volume 3*. *The First Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1934*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 21. *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 21.

⁵⁰ City of West Bend Records: "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, p. 9. *The First Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1934*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 21. ("A modern band stand of Lannon stone construction is about completed. Plans are being made for the construction of a modern bath and recreational pavilion which is expected to be completed in time for the 1935 summer season.") *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 7. ("Some 1935 Accomplishments: . . . Band Stand – Octagon shaped, Lannon stone band stand constructed in the

A Homecoming Celebration was held in July 1935 to commemorate West Bend's 50th anniversary, and the City dedicated the park to Henry O. Regner.⁵¹ Carl Pick was the President and General Chairman of the 1935 Homecoming Committee and baseball games were played at the High School grounds on July 4th, West Bend v. Port Washington, and July 7th, West Bend v. Fond du Lac.⁵² The total amount of money invested in the park as reported in the July 1935 West Bend Golden Anniversary Homecoming program was about \$67,000; the federal government (under the CWA and FERA projects) paid about \$44,000 and the City of West Bend paid \$22,614--\$9,223.53 which was attributable to land acquisition.⁵³ The New Deal funds enabled the City of West Bend to complete the project 20 years earlier than originally anticipated.⁵⁴

Although City Park was dedicated in July 1935, it was far from complete. The land in the eastern half of the park was the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision that included 302 lots. As of 1935, the City of West Bend had not yet acquired many of the lots in the subdivision including the lots with road frontage on Highway 55 (now N. Main St.), Spruce Street (now Silverbrook), and Park Avenue which were critical for park access. This point was underscored in the City of West Bend's 1935 annual report which described its planned land acquisition for City Park as follows: "Acquire for the present park the lots which are located along Highway 55. The strip of land is bounded on the south by the street that runs westward from Highway 55 at Kannenberg's filling station [Spruce Street] and is bounded on the north by the creek. Also acquire from the West Bend Lithia company the triangular tract of land located north of the present ice house and between the river and Highway 55. All of this additional land should be developed as a unit with our present project."⁵⁵

The following map is the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision surveyed on April 18, 1916. The approximate location of the baseball diamond at Regner Park has been overlaid on this map, which has been colored to reflect the City of West Bend's land acquisition during the period 1930-37.

city park. Bath House and Recreational Building – Built of Lannon stone, for use in connection with the bathing beach at the city park. Bridge – Concrete bridge built over Silver Creek on new park road. Park – City park dedicated July 5, bathing beach opened, bath house, band stand, refreshment stand and rest room constructed. Two parking areas added and park grounds landscaped. . . . Refreshment Stand – Octagon shaped, Lannon stone refreshment stand constructed in city park. . . ."

⁵¹ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 37. City of West Bend Records: "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, p. 8.

⁵² City of West Bend Records: "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, pp. 18, 19, 25.

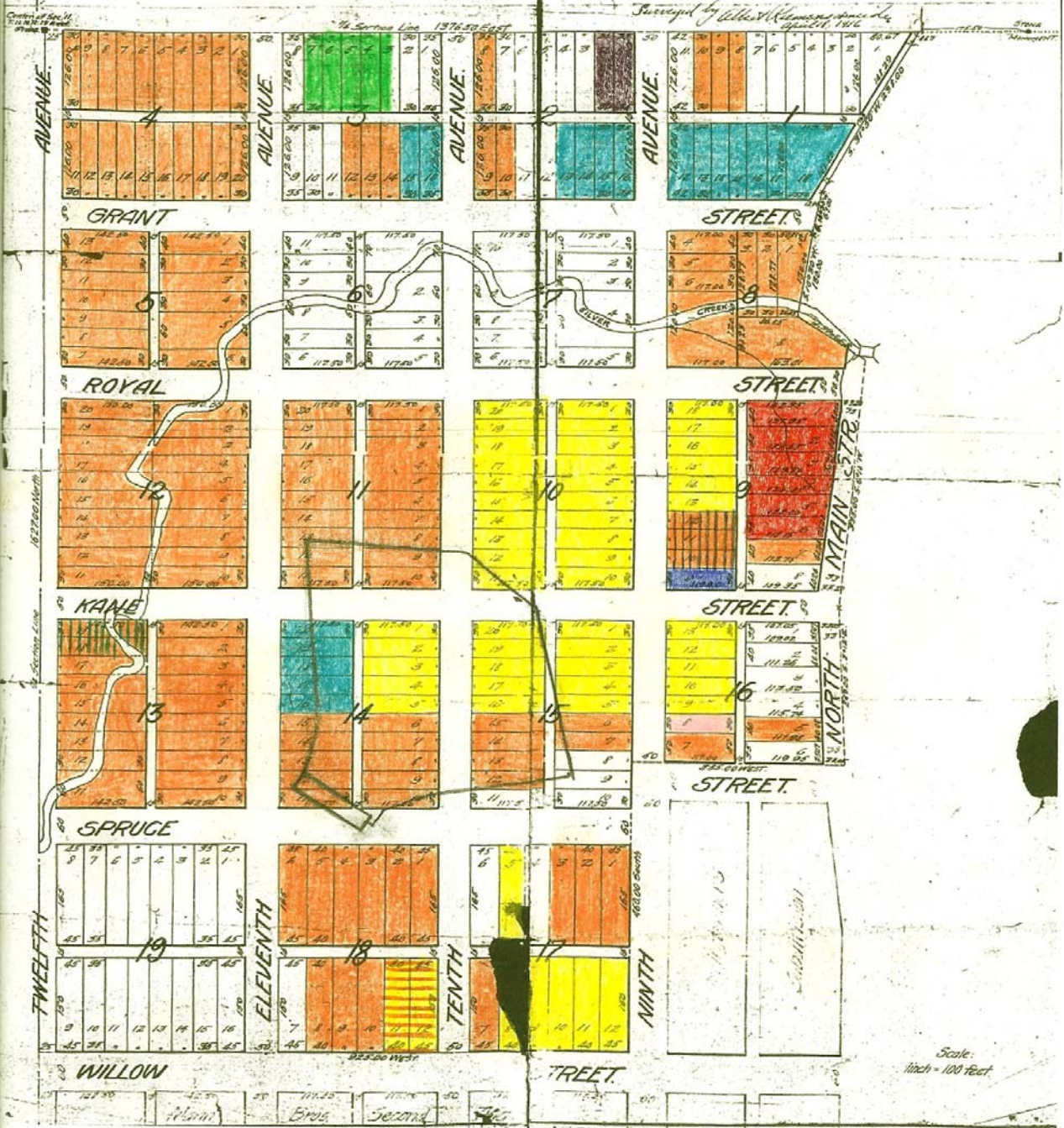
⁵³ "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, p. 9.

⁵⁴ "West Bend Golden Anniversary HOMECOMING, Celebrating 50 Years of Progress, July 4 to 7, 1935," Souvenir Booklet and Program, p. 9.

⁵⁵ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the year ending December 31, 1936*, p. 10.

MAP OF CRYSTAL SPRING E. CITY SUBDIVISION

Being a Subdivision of a Part of the Southeast 1/4 of Section 11, Township 11, North of Range 19 East, in the CITY OF WEST BEND - WASHINGTON COUNTY - WISCONSIN.



- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 4/26/1930 Jos. A. Kleiber | 3/16/1935 Gustave Klemke | 2/18/37 Dient |
| 7/23/1932 Tax Delinquent Auction | 2/6/1934 Louise Monson | 3/24/37 Kleib |
| 12/18/1933 Charles Groeschel | 6/20/1935 Knoeller | |

Work continued on the park throughout 1935 and into 1936. In 1935, 14 additional lots were acquired, and \$4,860 was received from the Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration to continue work started in November 1933—“completion of lagoon excavation, grading and seeding playground area, construction of walks and driveways, planting of trees and shrubs, rip-rapping stream and river, and building two wooden bridges.”⁵⁶ In 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) supervised the construction of additional roads and a water fall. By March 1936, the WPA had filled 50 acres of low land, rip-rapped stream banks, and completed a pump house.⁵⁷ In 1936, the local Girl Scout troop erected a small cabin in the west side of the park which it named the Tri Foil Lodge.⁵⁸ The City of West Bend’s 1936 reported accomplishments at City Park included neither land acquisition nor mention of the baseball field.⁵⁹

While City Park is widely credited to the vision of Mayor Henry O. Regner (1926-30) who secured the first 30 acres of land in early-1930, the baseball field at City Park resulted from the vision of the two subsequent City of West Bend mayors, Joseph M. Knippel (1930-40) and Clyde J. Schloemer (1940-48). It was on Mayor Knippel’s watch that additional land was acquired for the park, park access was assured, the baseball diamond was built and the West Bend Athletic Commission was created which was responsible for promoting and supporting athletics—including baseball—in the City. It was on Mayor Schloemer’s watch that lights were added to the field which established West Bend as a leader and a progressive, modern baseball city.

In 1933, the idea of a baseball field in the eastern part of City Park was just a plan, with no assurance as to when, if ever, it might be built. First, the City had to acquire substantially all of the land in the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision—302 lots from many different owners. It was a slow process. In the end, the actual baseball field construction did not start for nearly five years; construction began in 1938 and was substantially complete in July 1939. Construction of the baseball field was dependent on the availability of funding as noted in *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, which stated: “It has been planned, when funds are available, to build baseball diamonds, tennis

⁵⁶ City of West Bend Records: *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 7. (Some 1935 Accomplishments . . . Land Purchased – Fourteen lots purchased and added to the park area. . . .”) Application for Approval of Work Project – Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration – Work Division, Project No. 66-B15-3E1 dated February 21, 1935 in the amount of \$2,160.00. for Approval of Work Project – Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration – Work Division, Project No. 66-B15-3E2 dated May 2, 1935 in the amount of \$2,700.00.

⁵⁷ “Facilities for Recreation to be Augmented,” *The Sheboygan Press*, March 4, 1936, p. 11.

⁵⁸ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of May 11, 1936 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

Minutes of July 13, 1933 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁵⁹ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Third Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1936*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 10. (“Some 1936 Accomplishments . . . Park – Constructed a series of waterfalls, also a well and pumphouse used in connection therewith. All walks were covered with crushed limestone. Built a cabin for the use of the girl scouts. Planted trees, flowers and shrubbery. Purchased additional picnic tables, built charcoal broilers and increased the size of the picnic grounds. Purchased an oil heater for the bath house so that the building could be heated for the benefit of the skaters and hockey players. . . .”)

courts and bleachers in the east end of the park.”⁶⁰ The plan was to acquire additional land for the athletic fields and the necessary access, and then build it with WPA funding, as noted in the City of West Bend’s 1936 annual report.⁶¹ Some of the additional land needed was purchased in 1937 as noted in the City of West Bend’s 1937 annual report which stated: “Purchased the Duenkel property and the Kleiber lots in the park area for the sum of \$6,500. The land is to be used for the athletic field.”⁶² The Kleiber lots—Lots 1 to 6 of Block 9 of the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision—were important for park access because they fronted on Hwy 55.⁶³

Under the leadership of Mayor Knippel, WPA funding to build the athletic fields was available in 1936 and construction began as noted in the City of West Bend’s third annual report which stated: “In 1936 we [City of West Bend Athletic Commission] promoted only one home team and played all our home games at the Fair Grounds. Baseball cannot be made to pay in West Bend until we have an adequate and **accessible** playing field. This, as you know, is now in the course of construction at the City Park.”⁶⁴ (Emphasis added.)

The next picture, an August 15, 1937 aerial photograph, shows the eastern half of Regner Park—where the baseball diamond is located—which occupies substantially all of the northwest ¼ of the southeast ¼ of Section 11, Township 11 north, Range 19 east.⁶⁵ This picture also shows that construction of the baseball field had not yet started by late-summer 1937. Note also, that the Children’s fishing pond to the north of the baseball field had not yet been dug.

⁶⁰ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Second Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 9.

⁶¹ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Third Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1936*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 12. (“The West Bend of Tomorrow - . . . Park – Entrance gates to be built as planned. Additional areas to be seeded and landscaped. Athletic field to be built with the aid of the Works Progress Administration. Additional land to be purchased for the athletic field. . . .”)

⁶² Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Fourth Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1937*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 10.

⁶³ City of West Bend Records: Map of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision, surveyed April 18, 1916. Provided by Richard G. Kleinmann, R.L.S., City Surveyor. Various Warranty Deeds relating to City Park land acquisition.

⁶⁴ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Third Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1936*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, pp. 13, 40.

⁶⁵ City of West Bend GIS Web Portal and discussion with Mark A. Piotrowicz, Assistant Director, City of West Bend Department of Community Development.



Source:
The Arthur H. Robinson Map
Library, University of
Wisconsin – Madison:
“Wisconsin Historic Aerial
Image Finder,”
Roll-Exp: 10-916, 8/15/1937.

The unrecorded proposed plat Crystal Spring Park Subdivision, shown above, covers this same land area.⁶⁶ The City Park baseball diamond and grandstand are located in the vicinity of Block 14 and parts of Blocks 15, 11, and 10 of the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision and covers approximately 42 lots. The City of West Bend acquired this land over the four year period from April 1930 to February 1934—and acquired 20 of the lots that the baseball field is situated on as part of the July 28, 1932 acquisition of tax delinquent lots in the proposed plat of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision.⁶⁷

Details regarding the actual progress of the baseball field construction at City Park are thin. The City of West Bend’s 1937 annual report identified one of the municipal improvements it contemplated for 1938 as “Hardball diamond and grandstands to be completed. Softball diamonds and tennis courts to be started. Entire front area of park to be filled and seeded.”⁶⁸ An April 14, 1938 *West Bend News* article reported: “The city has a crew of 25 WPA workers on the job at the City Park, where they are engaged in working on the paths and on the athletic field. Part of the crew is made up of men taken off the city relief rolls.”⁶⁹ City of West Bend

⁶⁶ City of West Bend Records: Map of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision, surveyed April 18, 1916. Provided by Richard G. Kleinmann, R.L.S., City Surveyor.

⁶⁷ City of West Bend Records: Map of Crystal Spring Park Subdivision, surveyed April 18, 1916. Provided by Richard G. Kleinmann, R.L.S., City Surveyor. Various Warranty Deeds relating to City Park land acquisition.

⁶⁸ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Fourth Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1937*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 13.

⁶⁹ “WPA Work at City Park,” *West Bend News*, April 14, 1938, p. 1.

records show that WPA work at City Park continued in 1939.⁷⁰ At some point during 1938-39, the grandstand at the baseball diamond was constructed from the old County Fairgrounds grandstand that was donated to the City by the heirs S.F. Mayer & Co.—Carl Pick and other Mayer family heirs—in November 1937. The old grandstand was then dismantled and moved to the City's park lands,⁷¹ where it was used to build the somewhat smaller, 108.9 feet by 26.1 feet, grandstand that still stands at Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field today. On June 12, 1939, the City Council authorized the construction of a roof over the grandstand at the baseball diamond;⁷² the roof was completed by July 13, 1939.⁷³

The new diamond was dedicated on July 2, 1939 in a ceremony that included many baseball dignitaries of the day. The celebration featured a parade that started at City Hall; a flag raising ceremony by the Boy Scouts; speeches by Joseph Knippel, mayor of the City of West Bend, Henry Regner, state commander of the American Legion, Henry Bendinger, President of the American Association minor league Milwaukee Brewers baseball club, and Carl Pick, President of the West Bend Athletic Commission and local industrialist. The highlight of the celebration was a baseball game between the West Bend and Fond du Lac city teams. Manager Jack Kullmann's West Bend Benders blasted their way to a decisive 18-5 victory over the Fond du Lac Cardinals that featured five West Bend home runs over the canvas fence—Curt Lane, Marv Zarling, George Sutter, and two by Junie Gonring [Matt Gonring, Jr.].⁷⁴ At the time of the dedication, the field had a canvas fence, no lights, and the roof over the grandstand had not yet been completed.⁷⁵

Let there be Lights

In the years that followed, several improvements were made to the field—the first major improvement was lights for night baseball. The idea of night baseball was first conceived in 1923 by F. W. Ralston, an engineer in Lynn, Massachusetts.⁷⁶ By 1929, the coming of night baseball in Wisconsin was being predicted. In April 1929, O.A. Kroos, Director of Wisconsin State league,

. . . predicted that before many years league games would be played at night, under the glare of flood lights, which would bring attendance during the week, up to the crowds on

⁷⁰ City of West Bend Records: e.g., Works Progress Administration – Project Financial Status Report. Official Project No. 665-53-2-429, Allotment W. P. No. 9519, with a presidential limitation of \$10,468.00.

⁷¹ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of November 8, 1937 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁷² City of West Bend Records: Minutes of June 12, 1939 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁷³ "Old Timers' Day at Next Sunday's Baseball Game at West Bend City Park," *West Bend Pilot*, July 13, 1939, p. 1.

⁷⁴ "Baseball Diamond Dedication Sunday, Parade to Start Gala Baseball Day in West Bend; Fond du Lac Nine Will Oppose Benders, Brewer Officials in Attendance," *West Bend News*, June 29, 1938, p. 1. "West Bend Defeats Fondy in Opener; Winners Blast 5 Homers to Score Decisive Win; Large Crowd Witnesses Parade and Dedication of New Baseball Diamond," *West Bend News*, p. 1. "Will Dedicate New Ball Park at West Bend," *The Sheboygan Press*, p. 14.

⁷⁵ "Baseball Diamond Dedication Sunday, Parade to Start Gala Baseball Day in West Bend; Fond du Lac Nine Will Oppose Benders, Brewer Officials in Attendance," *West Bend News*, June 29, 1938, p. 1.

⁷⁶ "Night Baseball Receives Trial At Des Moines, Baseball By Artificial Light To Be Watched By Judge Landis And Officials Tonight," *The Sheboygan Press*, May 1, 1930, p. 1.

Saturdays and Sundays. . .At this time night football games have been tried out and next fall Notre Dame and Drake will play a game at night, at Soldier's Field, Chicago. It is known that big league magnates have been investigating the feasibility of lighting up their parks by means of flood lights, that would allow playing of games after dark. The financial returns would be tremendous, it is pointed out, when the thousands of fans barred by employment from attending week-day games, would be enabled to take in the games, if they were played after supper.⁷⁷

The Des Moines minor league baseball club was night baseball's pioneer.⁷⁸ May 2, 1930, at Des Moines, Iowa, marked the first time baseball was played under high power lights which was described by minor league executives at the time as "the most forward looking experiment in modern baseball," and was seen as a remedy to the dwindling attendance at ball games.⁷⁹ The first Wisconsin State league club to play a night game under artificial lights was Kenosha on August 22, 1930.⁸⁰ Interestingly, the early Wisconsin night baseball games in Kenosha, Sheboygan, and Milwaukee were played under the artificial light furnished by giant portable lights owned by the Kansas City Monarchs, a professional negro baseball team.⁸¹ The following picture published in *The Sheboygan Press* in 1930 shows one of the Kansas City Monarchs' portable lights.

⁷⁷ "Much Gossip To Report In State League, Interesting Sport Items From Here And There On The State League, Its Plans And Players," *The Sheboygan Press*, April 29, 1929, p. 1.

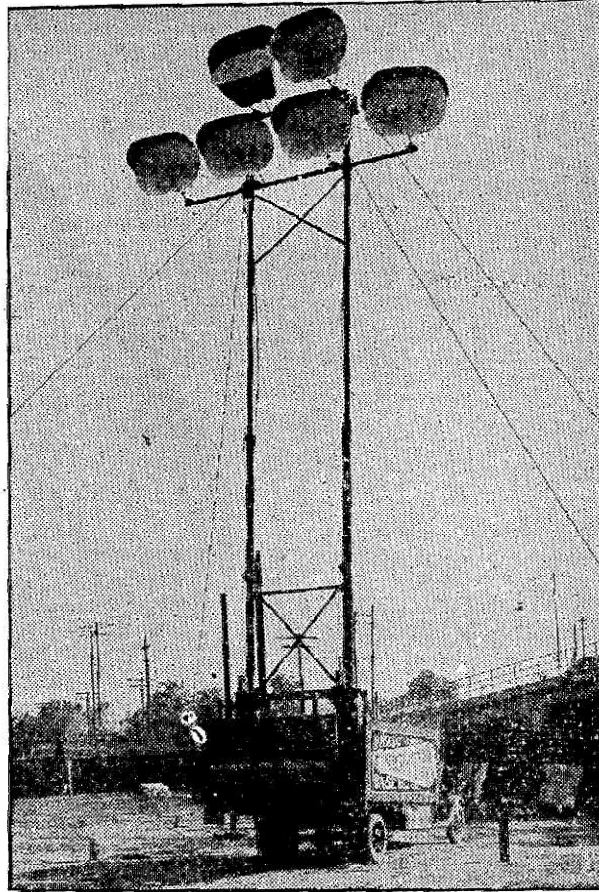
⁷⁸ "Some Little Nuggets From 50 Golden Years," *The Sheboygan Press*, February 9, 1951, p. 17.

⁷⁹ "Des Moines To Try Out Night Baseball Game," *The Sheboygan Press*, April 29, 1930, p. 14. "Night Baseball Receives Trial At Des Moines, Baseball By Artificial Light To Be Watched By Judge Landis And Officials Tonight," *The Sheboygan Press*, May 1, 1930, p. 1.

⁸⁰ "Night Baseball Gaining," *The Sheboygan Press*, August 14, 1930, p. 14.

⁸¹ "Chairmakers Inaugurate Night Baseball Here Next Tuesday, Nee-Menasha To Meet Sheboygan Under Big Arcs, Equipment Of Kansas City Monarchs Will Be Used In Debut Of Night Ball In Sheboygan," *The Sheboygan Press*, August 19, 1930, p. 12. "4,000 To Witness Night Baseball Inaugural Tonight, Record For Attendance May Be Shattered Here Tonight," *The Sheboygan Press*, August 26, 1930, p. 26. "Night Baseball To Be Played Here On Sept. 3, Champ Negro Team Will Oppose State League Lineup," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 21, 1930, p. 10.

Night Baseball Equipment



Pictured above is one of the giant lights which will make night baseball a reality for Sheboygan a week from tonight. A battery of these powerful arcs will illuminate the field sufficiently for baseball, a fact which has been proven in other cities.

In August 1930, night baseball was described as “a sweeping reform [that] has been enacted in more than 40 cities, large and small, throughout the country.”⁸² At that time, the minor league baseball Pacific Coast League was playing at night in Sacramento and Los Angeles and was planning to have all of its parks lighted in time for the 1931 season. “The idea is slowly catching on with the big league magnates, who have been watching with a fascinated eye the increases shown in the minors where night baseball has been successful.”⁸³ The Cincinnati Reds’ 1935 “experiment” with night baseball was described as profitable.⁸⁴ The New York Yankees played their first night games in 1939—the first in Philadelphia against the Athletics on June 26, 1939,

⁸² “Night Baseball Popular Savior Of Minor Clubs, Game May Lose Through Artificial Lighting Arrangement But Gate Shows Boom,” *The Sheboygan Press*, August 4, 1930, p. 1.

⁸³ “Night Baseball Popular Savior Of Minor Clubs, Game May Lose Through Artificial Lighting Arrangement But Gate Shows Boom,” *The Sheboygan Press*, August 4, 1930, p. 1.

⁸⁴ “Most Big Loop Clubs Produced Profit For '35,” *The Sheboygan Press*, October 12, 1935, p. 10.

and the second in Cleveland on August 30, 1939.⁸⁵ And, the City of West Bend was right there with them.

The City of West Bend first began discussing the possibility of lights at the baseball field in City Park on May 19, 1939—before the field was dedicated—however, no action was taken.⁸⁶ In the fall of 1940, the Milwaukee Brewers Baseball Club offered the City a used lighting system from its Bloomington, Illinois farm team, and on September 20, 1940, Mayor Schloemer recommended that the city purchase it.⁸⁷ The Brewers' Bloomington team played in the Three-I league, and had been playing under lights since 1930.⁸⁸ A committee was appointed to make the purchase.⁸⁹ Carl Pick stepped forward and purchased the lights and donated them for the baseball field at City Park.⁹⁰ The City was slow to move forward and install the lights. Seven months later, on April 22, 1941, members of the West Bend Athletic Commission and a group of ball players appeared before the City Council to again discuss lights at the hard ball field. After considerable discussion, the Board of Public Works was authorized to prepare plans and specifications and advertise for bids.⁹¹ On May 12, 1941, the City of West Bend accepted the bids for the lighting system at the hard ball field. The total cost was \$3,666.⁹²

The lighting installation at the field disrupted the 1941 summer baseball schedule and no games were played at the City Park diamond over the Fourth of July “[b]ecause Billy Burckhardt and his crew of electricians have the diamond rooted up with trenches for the underground wiring for the lights.”⁹³ The new lighting system was described as “as powerful as any in the state with the exception of the Brewers,”⁹⁴ who had been playing under lights at Borchert Park in Milwaukee since June 6, 1935.⁹⁵

On July 17, 1941, night baseball made its debut in the City of West Bend, and “the largest crowd in the history of West Bend baseball [was] expected to jam the City Park diamond.”⁹⁶ The West Bend Lithias of the Land O’ Lakes league team took on the Bucyrus Erie nine of the

⁸⁵ “Yankees Will Play Nights,” *The Sheboygan Press*, May 18, 1939, p. 16.

⁸⁶ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of May 19, 1939 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁸⁷ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of September 20, 1940 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*. “Opening Night Ball Game Here Tonight, Lithia Beers Meet Bucyrus-Erie Club Under Floodlights, Large Crowd Is Expected at Park,” *West Bend News*, July 17, 1941, p. 1.

⁸⁸ “Chairmakers Inaugurate Night Baseball Here Next Tuesday, Nee-Menasha To Meet Sheboygan Under Big Arcs, Equipment Of Kansas City Monarchs Will Be Used In Debut Of Night Ball In Sheboygan,” *The Sheboygan Press*, August 19, 1930, p. 12.

⁸⁹ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of September 20, 1940 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁹⁰ Leif Eriksen, “Athletic fields’ defeat was no surprise,” *The West Bend News*, April 1980.

⁹¹ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of April 22, 1941 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁹² City of West Bend Records: Minutes of May 12, 1941 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*. City of West Bend Records: Minutes of May 4, 1941 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

⁹³ “Sports of the Week,” *West Bend News*, July 13, 1941, p. 11.

⁹⁴ “Opening Night Ball Game Here Tonight, Lithia Beers Meet Bucyrus-Erie Club Under Floodlights, Large Crowd Is Expected at Park,” *West Bend News*, July 17, 1941, p. 1.

⁹⁵ “Brewers Hold Dress Rehearsal Under Arcs,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 2, 1935, Sports, p. 1. “Brewers Turn Playboys Under the Bright Lights,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 5, 1935, p. 4.

⁹⁶ “Opening Night Ball Game Here Tonight, Lithia Beers Meet Bucyrus-Erie Club Under Floodlights, Large Crowd Is Expected at Park,” *West Bend News*, July 17, 1941, p. 1.

Milwaukee Industrial league, who in 25 years of play had finished either first or second place in the leagues they entered.⁹⁷ Before the game, the Civic Concert Band entertained the crowd.⁹⁸ Mayor Schloemer gave the opening address and dedicated the lights to the youth of this community. Carl Pick introduced the new owner of the Milwaukee Brewers, William Veeck—who gained notoriety as the longtime owner of the Chicago White Sox from 1959-81 and regarded as a promotional genius⁹⁹—and the game was announced over City Park’s Landvatter public address system. An estimated 1,000 fans filled the grandstand and watched the West Bend Lithias win, 6-4, in a rain shortened game of 4 ½ innings.¹⁰⁰

Interestingly, Bill Veeck is part of West Bend history. In June 1941, 27 year old Bill Veeck bought the financially troubled Milwaukee Brewers, an American Association Triple-A team, in partnership with former Cubs player and manager, Charlie Grimm, and others.¹⁰¹ Veeck owned the Brewers until 1945 during which time he lived on a farm near West Bend.¹⁰² Bill Veeck’s autobiography included this anecdote about his life in West Bend when he owned the Milwaukee Brewers: “I was living up on a farm outside West Bend, a very friendly little community. We had ten other people on our party line, and they were all very faithful about listening in on our phone calls to make sure they had the latest dope about the team. Sometimes there would be so many people on the line that I couldn’t hear the guy at the other end. I’d have to ask some of my fellow subscribers to hang up and call me back later to find out what happened.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ “Lithia Beers to Face Bucyrus Erie Club in Opening Night Baseball Tilt,” *West Bend News*, July 10, 1941, p. 6.

⁹⁸ “Rain Halts Opening Night Baseball Tilt Here Last Thursday, Estimated 1,000 Fans Saw Enough For Official Game, Beers Trip Bucs by Score of 6-4,” *West Bend News*, July 24, 1941, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Nick Acocella. “Baseball’s Showman,” *ESPN Classic*, August 20, 2007. “Bill Veeck,” *BaseballLibrary.com*.

¹⁰⁰ “Rain Halts Opening Night Baseball Tilt Here Last Thursday, Estimated 1,000 Fans Saw Enough For Official Game, Beers Trip Bucs by Score of 6-4,” *West Bend News*, July 24, 1941, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ “Milwaukee Brewers Sold In Association, Chicago Cubs To Have Agreement With Club,” *The Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, Ohio), June 24, 1941, p. 11.

¹⁰² Bill Veeck, Ed Linn, *Veeck as in wreck: the autobiography of Bill Veeck*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1962, p. 79.

¹⁰³ Bill Veeck, Ed Linn, *Veeck as in wreck: the autobiography of Bill Veeck*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1962, p. 79.

The following picture is from one of the first night games at the City Park baseball field in July 1941.



Source:
WCHS#016,659

The new, used lights were relatively short-lived, however, and were replaced less than a decade later. On April 10, 1950, the "City Clerk was authorized to receive bids on a new lighting system for the baseball field to replace the present fixtures which have rusted through, and in their present condition are dangerous to persons standing or seated below the lights."¹⁰⁴ On April 24, 1950, the City Council authorized the purchase of new flood lights for the baseball diamond. The cost was \$4,634.¹⁰⁵

Two decades later, in 1970, the old wiring system at the Regner Park hardball diamond was replaced with an entire new underground wiring system, and "in addition, relamping, adjusting and cleaning of the system's fixtures, once again gave us an excellent, trouble free facility."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: Minutes of April 10, 1950 City Council meeting, *1950 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁰⁵ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: Minutes of April 24, 1950 City Council meeting, *1950 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁰⁶ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: February 1, 1971 West Bend Recreation Department Annual Report, *1971 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

The 1970 electrical work was completed by Burckhardt Electric—the project’s only bidder—at a cost of \$10,815.00.¹⁰⁷

By 1982, the 1950 lights had been in service for more than 30 years, and needed to be replaced. The hardball diamond’s lights topped the West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission’s 1983 list for capital improvements.¹⁰⁸ With the aid of federal grant money, the project was approved on October 6, 1983, and the relighting of the hardball diamond was completed by December 1, 1983 at an estimated cost of \$30,000.¹⁰⁹

In July 2001, the City solicited for bids to rewire the Regner Park Baseball Field and upgrade the electrical service to 600 amps. On August 6, 2001, the work was awarded to Pieper Power, Inc. of Milwaukee and the total contract was \$36,751.¹¹⁰

The hardball diamond’s current lighting system—and its 1983 fixtures, now 28 years old, atop 1941 poles, now 70 years old—is once again in need of replacement.

The Fence

The second major improvement at the City Park baseball field was the installation of a permanent fence. When the baseball field was dedicated on July 2, 1939, it was outfitted with a canvas fence.¹¹¹ This fence was in need of repair almost immediately, which was referred to the Board of Public Works for action first on April 29, 1940.¹¹² The 1941 aerial photograph, below, shows the City Park baseball diamond with its canvas fence. The unusual shape of the fence was attributable to the fact that the rectangular section was also used as a football field. Also note the northwest facing softball diamond to the right of the hardball diamond that was eliminated at some point prior to 1950. A new softball diamond was approved in 1960, and

¹⁰⁷ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: April 20, 1970 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1970 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁰⁸ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: August 12, 1982 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1982 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. September 16, 1982 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1982 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. November 4, 1982 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1982 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. December 2, 1982 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1982 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. May 5, 1983 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1983 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. June 2, 1983 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1983 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁰⁹ City of West Bend Records: December 2, 1982 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes; September 1, 1983 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes; October 6, 1983 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes; November 11, 1983 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes; December 1, 1983 West Bend Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes.

¹¹⁰ City of West Bend Records: July 30, 2001 memo from Stephen Scharrer, Director to Dennis Melvin, City Administrator, Subject: Awarding of Contract 01-13 for the Regner Park Baseball Field Rewiring. August 6, 2001 Contract by and between Pieper Electric, Inc, and the City of West Bend.

¹¹¹ “Baseball Diamond Dedication Sunday, Parade to Start Gala Baseball Day in West Bend; Fond du Lac Nine Will Oppose Benders, Brewer Officials in Attendance,” *West Bend News*, June 29, 1938, p. 1.

¹¹² City of West Bend Records: April 29, 1940 City Council Meeting Minutes, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

returned in its current location as a northeast facing softball diamond next to the hardball diamond sometime between 1963 and 1970.¹¹³



Source:
Washington County, WI
Geographic Information Web
Server – Aerial Photography:
1941 Aerial

The next aerial photograph is from 1950 and shows the baseball field with its new fence:



Source:
Washington County, WI
Geographic Information Web
Server – Aerial Photography:
1950 Aerial

¹¹³ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: June 20, 1960 Common Council Meeting Minutes, 1960 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin. Washington County, WI Geographic Information Web Server – Aerial Photography, 1963 Aerial, 1970 aerial.

By 1944, the canvas fence was worn out and needed to be replaced.¹¹⁴ In the City of West Bend's 1944 Planning Program, a permanent fence for the baseball diamond was described as a "Special Essential Project." The cost of the fence was estimated at \$3,000 with \$1,000 to be provided by the sale of advertising space on the fence.¹¹⁵ The following picture is circa 1945-47 and shows the baseball field with lights but without a fence.



Source:
City of West Bend Community Development Department

¹¹⁴ Washington County Historical Society Records: Otto Weber, Alderman; W.T. Leins, City Engineer; N.A. Schowalter, Secretary; A.M. Koelsch; George Hood; Leonard Benedict; C.J. Schloemer, Mayor, "A Planning Program for West Bend," February 10, 1944.

¹¹⁵ Washington County Historical Society Records: Otto Weber, Alderman; W.T. Leins, City Engineer; N.A. Schowalter, Secretary; A.M. Koelsch; George Hood; Leonard Benedict; C.J. Schloemer, Mayor, "A Planning Program for West Bend," February 10, 1944.

On September 23, 1946, the City Council accepted Cyclone Fence Company's bid to install new fencing around the hardball field at a cost of \$2,310, with the project to be completed by May 1, 1947.¹¹⁶

The following picture is from a City of West Bend promotional folio circa 1970 and shows Regner Park's trademark ivy-covered baseball fence.¹¹⁷



Source:
WCHS

¹¹⁶ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: September 23, 1946 City Council Meeting Minutes, 1946 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin.

¹¹⁷ Washington County Historical Society Records: City of West Bend Promotional Folio published by the West Bend Chamber of Commerce, circa 1970, WCHS#200,064.

By 2004, the nearly 50 year old fence was in need of replacement. On August 4, 2004, the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department requested permission to advertise for bids for the reconstruction of the Regner Park Baseball Diamond fencing. It was stated that "With exposed steel fence posts, screening pulled away from the vertical piping and the leaning of the fence, many safety concerns are present with the fence as it currently exists."¹¹⁸ On September 30, 2004, the City of West Bend awarded the fencing contract to Century Fence Company in the amount of \$24,986.00.¹¹⁹ The date for completion was November 8, 2004.¹²⁰

The "Comfort Station and Concession Stand"

There were several other early projects, however, information regarding these projects is sketchy. On June 10, 1940, the City authorized the construction of rest rooms and a storage shed at the baseball field.¹²¹ In 1945, the Board of Public Works authorized the construction of a Press Box on the grand stand roof,¹²² although it was apparently never built. On June 26, 1950, the City Council considered the matter of installing a magnetic switch with remote control at the baseball field and referred it to the Board of Public Works for action.¹²³

The third major improvement at the baseball field was the construction of a Comfort Station (rest rooms) and Concession Stand during 1968-71, and was also a long process. It began on February 19, 1968 when the City Council authorized the construction of a building for concessions at the baseball field, based on the recommendation of the Board of Public Works. The estimated cost was \$7,980.¹²⁴ In March 1969, the City Council authorized Donohue and Associates to proceed with plans and specifications for restrooms and a concession stand. On May 19, 1969, the City Council authorized the Clerk to proceed with advertising for bids for the Regner Park Concession Stand.¹²⁵ On June 16, 1969 and again on December 1, 1969, the City Counsel voted to reject the bids.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ City of West Bend Records: August 4, 2004 Memo from Lynda Schmidt, Landscape Architect to Dennis Melvin, City Administrator, Re: Permission to Advertise for Contract 04-22: Regner Park Baseball Diamond Fencing.

¹¹⁹ City of West Bend Records: September 30, 2004 Notice of Award to Century Fence Company, Contract 04-22: Regner Park Baseball Diamond Fencing.

¹²⁰ City of West Bend Records: September 29, 2004 Notice to Proceed to Century Fence Company, Contract 04-22: Regner Park Hardball Diamond Fencing.

¹²¹ City of West Bend Records: Minutes of June 10, 1940 City Council meeting, *Council Proceedings, Volume 4*.

¹²² City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: Annual Report of the Board of Public Works for 1945, *1945 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²³ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: June 26, 1950 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1950 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²⁴ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: February 19, 1968 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1968 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²⁵ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: May 19, 1969 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1969 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²⁶ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: May 19, 1969 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1969 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. June 16, 1969 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1969 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. November 17, 1969 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1969 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

On February 16, 1970, the City Council again authorized the Clerk to advertise for bids for the concession stand and restrooms at Regner Park together with a building at Riverside Park.¹²⁷ On April 20, 1970, the City Council unanimously approved the bids on the shelter buildings; construction was completed in 1970, and landscaping and sidewalks around the new concession stand and restrooms were completed in 1971.¹²⁸

The New Dugouts

The fourth, and most recent, major improvement at the baseball field was the all new dugouts. On September 24, 2004, the West Bend Baseball Association, Inc. ("WBBA") and the City of West Bend entered into the "Regner Baseball Diamond Improvements Agreement," whereby the WBBA assisted the City in improving the Regner baseball diamond by reconstructing the dugouts.¹²⁹ The project was completed in early-spring 2005 at an estimated cost of \$31,400.

Maintaining the Historic Grandstand

The grandstand at Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field is a structure of historical significance as it is the last remaining vestige of the original Washington County Fair Park fairgrounds where the annual county fair was held from 1867 to 1937. The grandstand that stands at Carl M. Kuss Field today, was constructed in 1938-39 from the old Washington County Fair Park grandstand that was donated to the City by the heirs of S.F. Mayer in November 1937.

Little is known about the history of the Fair Park grandstand. The original horse racing grandstand was built in 1867.¹³⁰ A new grandstand was completed in 1878 which was described as "the best improvement this year. The old relic would have fallen over this season, sure."¹³¹ Pictures establish that the old grandstand dates to circa 1920.¹³² The December 1919

December 1, 1969 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1969 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²⁷ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: February 16, 1970 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1970 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²⁸ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: April 20, 1970 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1970 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. February 1, 1971 West Bend Recreation Department Annual Report, *1971 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. February 1, 1972 West Bend Recreation Department Annual Report, *1972 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹²⁹ City of West Bend Records: September 24, 2004 "Regner Baseball Diamond Improvements Agreement."

¹³⁰ Carl Quickert, *History of Washington and Ozaukee Counties*, (Western Historical Company, Chicago) 1881, p. 372. Carl Quickert, *Washington County Wisconsin Past and Present, Volume I*, (The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago) 1912, p. 162.

¹³¹ "COUNTY FAIR; A Very Successful Gathering-The Best Exhibition Ever Held on the Society's Grounds," *West Bend Democrat*, October 9, 1878. See also, Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Fourth Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1937*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 36. (1878 Map of West Bend showing location of Fair grounds with north to south oriented race track.)

¹³² Washington County Historical Society photographs: c. 1920 photos: WCHS#015-135, 015-136, 015-137

and January 1928 Sanborn Maps establish that the old grandstand was standing at that time.¹³³ It is likely, that the old grandstand was built around 1912 when the layout of the horse racing track was changed.¹³⁴

Since its reconstruction at the baseball diamond at Regner Park in 1939, the City has maintained and repaired the grandstand. The City's records show that the entire grandstand was painted in 1955 and 1963.¹³⁵ By December 1982, an inspection report revealed that the grandstand was in need of more major repairs. The City admitted that it had neglected the grandstand, however, the city building inspector reported that he was amazed at the soundness of the grandstand and concluded that it was well constructed and could last another 20 to 30 years.¹³⁶ Proposals to repair or replace the grandstand were considered—the options at the time were “Fix it or tear it down.”¹³⁷

In 1982, the West Bend Park and Recreation Commission voted unanimously to repair rather than replace the grandstand.¹³⁸ A three year repair program was developed with the Park Dept. to replace rotting floor boards and install lighting inside the grandstand in 1983, followed by contractor work to reinforce the main timber supports, remove rot from the upright supports, and replace the roof in 1984, and further contractor work to remove and replace the rear outriggers and paint the entire grandstand in 1985.¹³⁹

By November 1983, the first phase of the grandstand repair project had been completed.¹⁴⁰ In September 1985, the Common Council approved the bid for grandstand renovation work in the amount of \$28,097.¹⁴¹ In December 1985, work on the grandstand was temporarily suspended

¹³³ Washington County Historical Society Records: December 1919 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,177, p. 8. January 1928 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,178, p. 11.

¹³⁴ Washington County Historical Society Records: 1910 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,176, p. 11. December 1919 Sanborn Map, WCHS#717,177, p. 8. In 1912, Carl Quickert noted that the race track at the fairgrounds was being rearranged. The 1910 and 1919 Sanborn Maps show how the track was rearranged. The 1910 Sanborn Map shows a race track layout that is north to south. The December 1919 Sanborn Map shows that the race track was moved to the north and oriented on a diagonal from northwest to southeast.

¹³⁵ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: June 13, 1955 City Council Meeting Minutes, *1955 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. October 7, 1963 City Council Meeting Minutes, *1963 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹³⁶ “Regner Park grandstand wins one for history,” *West Bend News*, January 6, 1983.

¹³⁷ “Regner Park grandstand wins one for history,” *West Bend News*, January 6, 1983.

¹³⁸ “Regner Park grandstand wins one for history,” *West Bend News*, January 6, 1983.

¹³⁹ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: December 2, 1982 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1982 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. “Regner Park grandstand wins one for history,” *West Bend News*, January 6, 1983.

¹⁴⁰ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: October 6, 1983 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1983 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. November 11, 1983 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1983 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁴¹ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: September 5, 1985 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1985 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. September 9, 1985 Common Council Meeting Minutes, *1985 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

due to unseasonably bad weather, with completion of the work expected in early spring.¹⁴² The grandstand was again painted in 1993 and 2003.¹⁴³

Naming the Field

The first suggestion regarding naming the baseball field at Regner Park was on May 18, 1959, when Robert Pick appeared and requested that the City Council adopt a resolution naming the hardball field at Regner Park Knippel Field.¹⁴⁴ No action was ever taken on Robert Pick's "Knippel Field" proposal.¹⁴⁵

Naming the field was a long process. In the end, it took three proposals over nearly two decades. The first proposal was on August 15, 1966; the Common Council received a letter from Paul Ziegler requesting that the hardball diamond at Regner be named as a memorial to Carl Kuss. The letter was placed in the City's file, but again, no action was taken.¹⁴⁶ More than a decade later, on October 21, 1976, Bob May, Jake Oelhafen, Ron Larson and Paul Ziegler appeared before the West Bend Park and Recreation Commission and again requested that the hardball diamond at Regner Park be named "Carl Kuss Field," with the assurance that it would be done at no cost to taxpayers.¹⁴⁷ The matter was discussed for a number of months, however, on July 18, 1977, the City Council voted against naming the hardball field Carl Kuss Field.¹⁴⁸ The third proposal on July 18, 1985 was successful. Paul Ziegler and several others appeared before the West Bend Park and Recreation Commission to again request that the Regner Park baseball field be named in memory of Carl Kuss who organized the City's baseball

¹⁴² City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: December 5, 1985 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1985 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁴³ City of West Bend Records: October 3, 1992 City of West Bend Requisition to Mayer Decorating, Inc. from West Bend Park, Recreation and Forestry. April 8, 2003 Contract – Regner Park Grandstand repainting, 2003 between Mayer Decorating, Inc. and the City of West Bend.

¹⁴⁴ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: May 18, 1959 City Council Meeting Minutes, *1959 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁴⁵ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: November 18, 1976 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1976 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁴⁶ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: August 15, 1966 City Council Meeting Minutes, *1959 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁴⁷ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: October 21, 1976 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1976 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁴⁸ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: November 18, 1976 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1976 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. December 2, 1976 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1976 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. July 18, 1977 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1977 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. R. B. Pick Scrapbook 1949-50: Leif Eriksen, "Exploring Sports with Leif Eriksen: Kuss Field at Regner?" *The West Bend News*, July 16, 1977. Leif Eriksen, "Exploring Sports with Leif Eriksen: Kuss Field has merits, maybe Hall of Fame too," *The West Bend News*, July 18, 1977. Joan Grosz, "No Kuss Field at Regner Park," *The West Bend Daily News*, July 18, 1977.

program in the early-1950s.¹⁴⁹ On August 19, 1985, the City Council unanimously voted to adopt Resolution No. 32 which reads:¹⁵⁰

RESOLUTION NO. 32
1985-1986 COUNCIL.

A Resolution Naming the Regner Park Baseball Field the Carl Kuss Memorial Field.

WHEREAS, Carl Kuss contributed significantly to the development and popularity of the sport of baseball in the City by organizing the first summer baseball program and by running the program for 1[5] years, and

WHEREAS, Carl Kuss was the high school baseball coach for 15 years and the coach of the first State Baseball Champion team in 1951, and

WHEREAS, the Park and Recreation Commission recommended on July 18, 1985 that the baseball field in Regner Park be named the "Carl Kuss Memorial Field."

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the baseball field in Regner Park shall hereafter be known as Carl Kuss Memorial Field.

Passed and approved this 19th day of August, 1985.

Introduced by Alderman Arden Fierek.

Donald L. Gonring, Mayor.

The effort culminated in the July 25, 1987 gala dedication ceremony that was organized by Paul Ziegler and Ron Larson as Co-Chairman of the Carl M. Kuss Memorial Committee. The dedication began with the National Anthem which was sung by the Peter Ayer Chorus. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Michael R. Miller. The Invocation was offered by Rev. Victor Hackbarth. Paul Ziegler was the Master of Ceremonies and welcomed the crowd. Speeches followed from Gary Anderson, City of West Bend Director of Parks, Recreation and Forestry, Mrs. Hope Cross Nelson, City of West Bend 4th District Alderman, Ron Larson, West Bend businessman and Co-Chairman of the Carl M. Kuss Memorial, Fred Hold, Former Superintendent of Schools in West Bend and Janesville, Wisconsin, Jeff Haebig, former athletic standout at West Bend High School, Mrs. Karla Kuss West, daughter of Carl Kuss. Mayor Miller provided the official proclamation and unveiled the new monument. The dedication was

¹⁴⁹ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: July 18, 1985 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes, *1985 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁵⁰ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: August 19, 1985 West Bend Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes and Resolution No. 32, *1985 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

followed by an Old-Timers game in which many of the stars of prior eras returned to play at the field. Both events were filmed by the City of West Bend's cable television department.

Baseball at City Park

The new baseball diamond located at the entrance to City Park was indeed one of the finest fields in the state. With its beautiful setting, large grandstand, loud speaker system, and lights for night baseball added in July 1941, it provided fantastic new opportunities to promote athletic events in West Bend. The West Bend Athletic Commission's 1937 annual report provided an early preview of the new era in West Bend baseball that was about to begin under the leadership of its Chairman, Carl S. Pick: "In 1937 we promoted a team in the Badger State League. As in the past few previous years, baseball again showed a loss. With the construction of the new park in process and the prospect of its use in the year 1938, the commission feels certain that we can make baseball self-sustaining next year. It may be necessary to combine some extra attractions with baseball, and we are making plans for the prospective bookings of such attractions at this time."¹⁵¹ And, Carl Pick and others used the dedication of the new diamond to kick off a new era in West Bend baseball.

Carl Pick was a master promoter. He was determined to make baseball self-sustaining and was described in July 1939 as "ever alert in matters pertaining to outdoor athletics." To that end, Carl Pick worked tirelessly to bring exciting events and top talent to play at the new baseball park in West Bend.¹⁵² Two weeks after the dedication, Carl Pick organized an "Old Timers" day at the new ball park held on July 16, 1939. The "Old Timers"—the surviving members of the old West Bend Blues baseball team which played in 1886, together with members of other old teams—were invited to be guests of the 1939 West Bend team as they took on the Milwaukee Fuels, one of the outstanding teams of the Triple A league of Milwaukee. The July 13, 1939 *West Bend Pilot* article publicizing the event stated: "The grandstand at the ball field is now under roof, and it is a real pleasure to occupy it while watching a game. Come to Sunday's game and see how the old-time players of fifty years ago are standing up today. They will appreciate a loaded grandstand and a packed field. Admission to the game is only 25 cents."¹⁵³

Carl Pick also brought colorful baseball celebrities to the new baseball diamond in West Bend. On October 12, 1939, Larry French—the Chicago Cubs' ace left-handed pitcher—and Charles Leo "Gabby" Hartnett—the Chicago Cubs' longtime, Hall of Fame catcher and manager who was considered the greatest catcher in the history of the National League until Johnny Bench came along—and Chicago Cubs coach, Roy Johnson, joined the West Bend Benders baseball team and played in a game at the new field against a first rate all-star team from the Triple A league in Milwaukee. Carl Pick was close personal friends with both Larry French, and Charlie Grimm, long-time manager of the Chicago Cubs (1932-38, 1944-49, 1960) and the Milwaukee

¹⁵¹ Washington County Historical Society Records: *The Fourth Annual Report of the City of West Bend for the Year Ending December 31, 1935*, compiled by Kenneth Weiss, City Clerk, p. 40.

¹⁵² "'Old Timers' Day at Next Sunday's Baseball Game at West Bend City Park," *West Bend Pilot*, July 13, 1939, p. 1.

¹⁵³ "'Old Timers' Day at Next Sunday's Baseball Game at West Bend City Park," *West Bend Pilot*, July 13, 1939, p. 1.

Braves' first manager (1953-56).¹⁵⁴ The game was attended by 1,400 West Bend fans who watched Larry French pitch 8 innings, fanning 16 batters, and Gabby Hartnett catch 7 innings, in a 7-6 West Bend Benders victory.¹⁵⁵ The following picture appeared in the *The Milwaukee Journal's* coverage of the game.



In 1947, games between West Bend teams and All-Negro teams were played. The West Bend Benders walloped the Chicago Brown Bombers, 11-3 on June 15, 1947.¹⁵⁶ On August 17, 1947, the largest paid attendance of the 1947 baseball season turned out to watch the West Bend Benders walloped the Chicago Barrons under the lights at City Park, by the same score, 11-3.¹⁵⁷

All-Star battles also attracted capacity crowds to West Bend City Park's baseball field. In August 1944, the Land O' Lakes league All-Stars took on the Rainbow league All-Stars twice, and each game attracted more than 700 fans.¹⁵⁸ On August 13, 1945, the West Bend All-Stars played the Milwaukee Brewers minor league team in an exhibition game at City Park—which drew 1,500 fans, the biggest crowd ever at the City Park ball diamond. Even though the

¹⁵⁴ Baseball-Reference.com: Charlie Grimm.

¹⁵⁵ "Hartnett, French Help West Bend to Triumph," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 13, 1939, p. 17.

¹⁵⁶ R.B. Pick Scrapbook 1947 – 1948: "West Bend Beats Chicago Bombers," *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 16, 1947.

¹⁵⁷ R.B. Pick Scrapbook 1947-1948: "Benders Capture Fifteenth Win of Season From Barons."

¹⁵⁸ "Plan Second League Game In One Week," *Sheboygan Press*, August 24, 1944, p. 24.

Milwaukee Brewers won 14-0, "none of the spectators left the field without commenting upon the excellent show they had witnessed."¹⁵⁹ In 1945, the Land O'Lakes All-Stars again took on the Rainbow League All-Stars, and the Rainbow League All-Stars took on the Allen Bradley team.¹⁶⁰ In 1946, the All-Stars of the Kettle Moraine League and the All-Stars of the Northern Division of the Land O' Lakes league played in an exhibition game, as did the All-Stars of the Land O' Rivers league. In 1946, the City Park baseball diamond was also host to an exhibition game between two famous local baseball families—the Holzhueter brothers and the Stapleton brothers.¹⁶¹

The West Bend Athletic Commission also organized many baseball events directed at helping West Bend youth. Professional baseball tryouts were held at the baseball diamond in City Park in 1948, 1949, and 1950. In 1948, a Brooklyn Dodgers Tryout Camp for boys who have graduated from high school and are too old to play Junior Legion baseball was sponsored by the management of the West Bend Bender baseball club held at the City Park baseball diamond from August 17 to 20, 1948. The camp was part of the Brooklyn Dodgers nationwide rookie hunt, directed by Brooklyn Dodgers Duce Belford, Harry McCurdy, Charles Smith, Ken Johnson, and Clark Swisher. At the close of a nationwide series of camps, the outstanding player would win a Dodger contract and a ten-day all expense trip with the Brooklyn club of the National League.¹⁶² In 1949, the West Bend Athletic Commission the *West Bend Pilot*, and the West Bend Benders baseball club sponsored a Cleveland Indians tryout camp on the City Park baseball diamond from July 5 to 9, 1949.¹⁶³ On July 25 and 26, 1949, the West Bend Athletic Commission sponsored a New York Yankee baseball tryout for boys ages 16 to 21 interested in a career in professional baseball that was held at the City Park baseball diamond. The tryout was directed by New York Yankee scouts—Burleigh Grimes, one of the all-time baseball pitching greats, Dutch Zwilling, former star outfielder and manager of the Kansas City Blues, and Lou Magoulo, Wisconsin area scout. Outstanding players could be signed to a contract

¹⁵⁹ Bill Bralick, "Brewers Score 14-0 Victory Over Land O' Lakes Stars," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, August 14, 1945, p. 7. "Brews Top Stars in 14 to 0 Fray," *Sheboygan Press*, August 14, 1945, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: "Report of Recreation Department for 1945," *1945 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁶¹ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: "Annual Report of the Athletic Commission for 1946," *1946 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. "K-M Players In West Bend All-Star Tiff," *The Sheboygan Press*, August 10, 1946, p. 12.

¹⁶² "Tryout Camp at West Bend," *Sheboygan Press*, August 14, 1948, p. 10. R.B. Pick Scrapbook 1947-48: "Dodger Scouts Will Be Here," *West Bend News*, July 8, 1948. "Brooklyn Dodger Try-out Camp To Be Held At Park," *West Bend Pilot*, August 19, 1948. "Many Candidates Out For Dodger Baseball Camp," *West Bend News*, August 19, 1948. "Baseball Minded Youngsters Get Pointers at Dodger School; Good Arm and Speed Are Rated Most Important Assets by Brooklyn Scouts in Search for Material; Their Advice to Youngsters: 'Pick Your Position,'" *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 22, 1948. "Dodger Try-Out Camp Attended By 90 Players," *West Bend News*, August 26, 1948.

¹⁶³ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: February 28, 1949 "Report of the West Bend Athletic Commission," *1949 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. March 28, 1949 "Report of the West Bend Athletic Commission," *1949 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. R.B. Pick Scrapbook 1949-50: "Pilot, Benders, and Athletic Commission Sponsors Cleveland Indians Baseball School Here," *The West Bend Pilot*, June 23, 1949. "Cleveland Indians Open School at City Park, July 5," *West Bend News*, June 23, 1949. "Cleveland Indians Hold Tryouts at West Bend, School Gets Under Way Tuesday Morning and Runs for Three Days; Big Turnout Seen," *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 2, 1949.

with a club in the Yankee organization or sent to an all-expense paid Yankee baseball school.¹⁶⁴ In 1950, the New York Yankees returned to City Park in West Bend for another Tryout Camp that was held on July 21 and 22, 1950.¹⁶⁵ A weekly baseball school for youth was also held at the City Park baseball diamond in 1947 and 1948.¹⁶⁶

The baseball diamond at Regner Park has also been the site of many other high profile events. For five years, from 1945 to 1949, the State Junior Baseball Tournament was played at the baseball field at City Park.¹⁶⁷ For 15 years, from 1956 to 1970, an annual benefit baseball game between the West Bend Lithias and another Land O'Lakes league team was held to support the Washington County Association for Retarded Children that was attended by 700 to 1,200 fans annually. All proceeds went to the Association to support its projects. From 2006 through 2011 college baseball has been played at Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field through the cooperation of Concordia University Wisconsin, the West Bend Baseball Association, Inc., and the West Bend Parks & Recreation Department.

And, the baseball field at City Park helped West Bend become an early leader in Wisconsin high school baseball. In 1933, West Bend High School introduced baseball as a major sport.¹⁶⁸ According to the WIAA, in 1942, only 40 schools in Wisconsin had a baseball teams, and the total number of participants was not more than 500; West Bend was one of those schools.¹⁶⁹ In 1946, the WIAA promoted a baseball program, and in 1951, 370 schools sponsored a baseball team; the total number of participants was 8,224.¹⁷⁰ The first WIAA State Baseball Tournament was not held until 1948.¹⁷¹ In 1950, the WIAA baseball tournament was held at City Park.¹⁷²

High school summer baseball also has its roots in West Bend at City Park, and is a credit to the work and dedication of West Bend High School Athletic Director and baseball coach, Carl M. Kuss. West Bend High School led the way in promoting baseball as a summer sport and first moved to a summer baseball schedule in 1957.¹⁷³ In 1960, through the efforts of Carl Kuss, a

¹⁶⁴ "Yankees Sponsor Tryouts At West Bend July 25-26," *The Sheboygan Press*, July 18, 1949, p. 15. R.B. Pick Scrapbook 1949-50: "Yankees Plan Try-Out Camp At City Park," *West Bend Pilot*, July 14, 1949.

¹⁶⁵ "Yankees' Tryout Camp July 21-22 Set at West Bend," *The Sheboygan Press*, June 29, 1950, p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: "Annual Report of the Athletic Commission for 1947," *1947 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. Annual Report of the Athletic Commission for 1948," *1948 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁶⁷ City of West Bend Records at West Bend Library: "Report of Recreation Department for 1945," *1945 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. "Annual Report of the Athletic Commission for 1946," *1946 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. "Annual Report of the Athletic Commission for 1948," *1948 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*. June 27, 1949 "Report of the West Bend Athletic Commission," *1949 Council Proceedings and Monthly Reports, City of West Bend, Wisconsin*.

¹⁶⁸ 1934 West Bend High School Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. ____.

¹⁶⁹ "Prep Baseball Enjoys Tremendous Growth," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 23, 1952, Part 2, page 3. 1943 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 24.

¹⁷⁰ "Prep Baseball Enjoys Tremendous Growth," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 23, 1952, Part 2, page 3. R. G. Lynch, "Major League Owners Finally See the Light," *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 8, 1952, p. 8.

¹⁷¹ "State Baseball Finalists Boast Crack Pitching," *The Sheboygan Press*, June 5, 1963, p. 22.

¹⁷² 1950 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 51.

¹⁷³ 1958 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 60.

new summer baseball conference—the Land O’ Lakes Conference—was established. That first year, there were only five teams in the conference—West Bend, Cedarburg, Port Washington, Germantown, and Thiensville.¹⁷⁴ West Bend won the conference with a 7-1 record.¹⁷⁵ In 1961, West Bend was conference co-champs, sharing the crown with Homestead who had an 11-4 record.¹⁷⁶ In 1962, the West Bend H.S. baseball team again won the conference with a perfect 12-0 record.¹⁷⁷ It was not until 1965, however, that the WIAA began an official summer baseball program, which it described at the time as an “innovation.”¹⁷⁸ And, for the first 24 years of Wisconsin high school summer baseball, from 1965 to 1988, the WIAA State Summer Baseball Tournament was played right here in West Bend at the place we call home, Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field.¹⁷⁹

* * *

What an amazing 72 years it has been!

Carl M. Kuss Memorial Baseball Field is the result of a dream, vision, and a lot of hard work. The dream was Dr. W.J. Wehle’s—that the people of West Bend have a City park for outdoor recreation. Mayors Regner and Knippel had vision—that such a park could be built, and perseverance that additional land should and could be acquired so that an accessible baseball field could be built in City Park. And the hard work started with Carl S. Pick and so many others—to usher in a new era of West Bend baseball at this field.

This look back is a tribute to all of those that have made the historic baseball field at Regner Park what it is today, and has been written down now so that all future generations may know of the vision, perseverance and dedication of these great men.

As we now look forward to the future of this great field, it is up to all of us to carry on the work of these dedicated men, thereby perpetuating forever the fine tradition that is West Bend baseball.

¹⁷⁴ 1961 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 112. 1963 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 111.

¹⁷⁵ 1961 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 112.

¹⁷⁶ 1962 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁷ 1963 West Bend H.S. Yearbook, *The Bend*, p. 111.

¹⁷⁸ “WIAA Sports Clinic Set at Stevens Point,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 25, 1965, p. 19.

¹⁷⁹ West Bend Baseball Association, Inc. website:

<http://www.eteamz.com/wbba/news/index.cfm?id=2004753&cat=235974>