

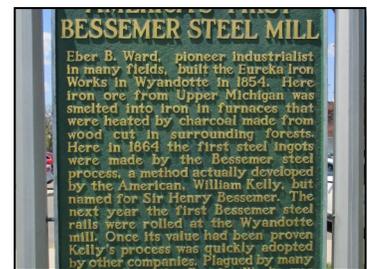
- EST. 1958 -

# WYANDOTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2021

VOLUME 8



Ah, how the land of Bishop Park has transformed and evolved through generations!

**MESSAGE FROM THE PREZ**

Dear Members of the Historical Society,

I can't believe I am writing the August Newsletter. I would like to share with you another great gem of Wyandotte. It gives us such fun in the summer time. We enjoy the summer breeze coming off the Detroit River; it is fun to watch the large ships cruising down the Detroit River, and maybe we enjoy people watching. You guessed it, Bishop Park.

Do you know when Bishop Park was started? Let's go back to the early 1880's, in the area we know as Bishop Park. It was a stretch of land that was marshy and full of beautiful trees. This ground was used as a dumping ground for the Eureka Iron Works. They dumped cinders in it. After the fill in process had hardened the land, the land became known as the Cinder Banks. It was used for baseball games and other sport events.

Two old names in Wyandotte's history, James Hurst and J. H. Bishop, thought the view from the Cinder Banks was quiet and pleasing. The view was also enjoyable. Hurst, in particular wanted to protect his view of the river from industry. The two gentlemen purchased the property. They leveled the land; planted grass seed, and opened the land as a park to the public.

Our city has done a wonderful job improving and maintaining it for the pleasure of many. The citizens of Wyandotte have another great gem to be proud of, the historic Bishop Park, the oldest park in the city.

Christopher Stieler, President

**Our Membership Continues to Grow!**

Please welcome our newest members:

Carl Boron

Tina Nixon

Mary Venetta Rothermal

Do you know what happened on August 21, 1959?

*(Turn this page upside down to see what happened.)*

Hawaii became the 50th state in the United States.

**Please Welcome Our New Museum Docent**

You may see a new face as you stop by the Museum. Diane Featherston expressed interest in leading tours a few months ago, communicating with Jane Rasmussen initially. After a couple meetings and shifts where she shadowed other docents, including Bruce and Jane, Diane now leads tours of the Ford-MacNichol Home on her own. See below for more information about Diane and why she decided to become a docent at the Wyandotte Museums.

*I am a retired Assistant Professor from Wayne State University College of Nursing. I have always loved nursing and teaching and now that I have been retired for a while, I decided to try something new, become more involved in the community and meet new people.*



*I was born and raised in Wyandotte and married my high school sweetheart, Tom, from Roosevelt High School. My ancestors were from Wyandotte as well. I remember my mom, who is 95 years old today, telling me she remembers her mother taking her to Mt. Carmel Cemetery and her mother telling her that her great-grandmother was buried there and showed her the gravesite. She was told that this great-grandmother lived in Wyandotte when the American Indians still inhabited the area.*

*I feel very connected to Wyandotte and feel that Wyandotte will always be my home town. I love to hear and learn about the history of the city. My relatives may have known some of the famous people from Wyandotte. I look forward to meeting others also interested in the history of the city.*

- Diane E. (Niebrzydowski) Featherston

Diane is a lovely person and, both the Wyandotte Museums and the Historical Society are pleased to have her on board as a new volunteer. If you'd like to tour the Museum sometime with Diane, reach out to Museum staff and we can help make that happen!

Are you interested in becoming a docent for the Wyandotte Museums? Contact Museum staff at (734) 324-7284 or via [museum@wyandottemi.gov](mailto:museum@wyandottemi.gov),

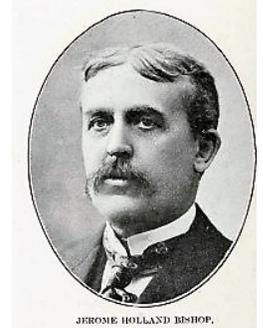
Jesse Rose, Museum Director

## THE NAMESAKE OF BISHOP PARK

We all know and love Bishop Park, but while there, have you ever stopped to think:

### Who was Bishop?

The name Bishop comes from Jerome Holland Bishop (shortened to J. H. Bishop). He was born on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1846 in Jefferson County, New York to William and Betsy Jerome Bishop. He came to Michigan in 1869 after receiving private education (mostly in chemistry) in New York. First, he became the superintendent of public schools in Decatur; then in 1871, he became the Superintendent of Wyandotte Public Schools and stayed in the position until 1875.

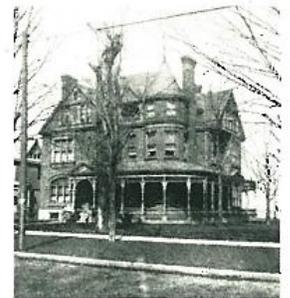


After leaving the superintendent position, he started the J. H. Bishop Fur Company. The company made fur and hide products, such as coats, robes, and rugs. The tannery took up a city block on the riverfront from Chestnut to Superior. The company employed about 100 men and women, and was the first American company to import furs and skins from Russia and China, but supplies also came from Canada, Australia, South Africa and various European countries. However, with the onslaught of World War I, foreign markets closed and even though the business was at its peak, the company had to shut down in 1914.

In 1867, he first married Jennie Gray and they had a daughter, Maud, but Jennie passed in 1873. Eventually, Maud married William J. Burns, the brother of the owner the Burns Home where the Museums office is now located. In 1878, Jerome married Eleanora Matilde Clark and they had four children – Jerome H. Jr., Della, Mabel, and Wallace. Jerome also served as the Mayor of Wyandotte from 1885-86 and 1905-07. During his time as mayor, he was a strong advocate for affordable housing and started a program for cheap houses for immigrants coming to work in Wyandotte. On the side, he had a great love of boats and rowing. Jerome died on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1928 at the age of 81.

In addition to his business in Wyandotte, Bishop owned a magnificent Queen Anne style house that was two doors down from the Ford-Bacon House on the corner of Biddle and Superior.

The house was used as Wyandotte City Hall in 1935 until 1968. The house was demolished after its time as City Hall and the Bishop Co-op has been on the site since 1971.



### Why was the park named after Bishop?

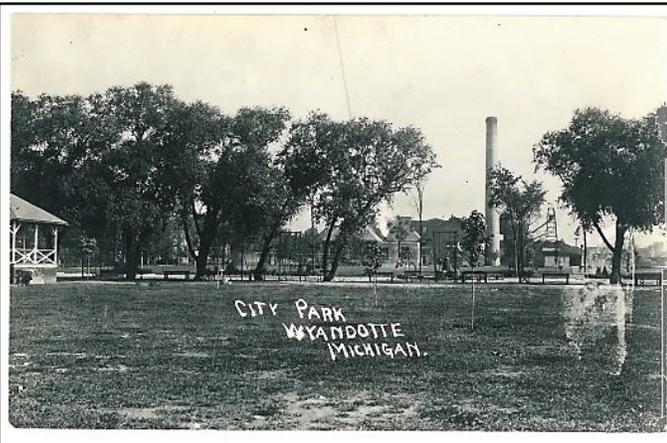
The story begins back in 1892, when the land was purchased by James T. Hurst (another prominent Wyandotte businessman and friend of Bishop) to make sure that a business could not build and obstruct his view of the river from his house, which sat between the Ford-Bacon and Bishop homes. Hurst sold a portion of this waterfront property to Bishop for his tannery. Hurst and Bishop then spent time beautifying the land next to the tannery to be used by citizens for sports, picnics, and Chautauqua lectures.

Once the J. H. Bishop Fur Company was out of business, there was no real reason for Jerome to keep the land and in 1917, Hurst and Bishop sold their portions of the riverfront to the City under the condition it be used for a public park. The tannery was demolished and the park was up and running by 1919, but it was not until 1922 that the park was dedicated as a memorial to Wyandotte soldiers that lost their lives in WWI. However, in 1927, City Council renamed the area Bishop Park after Jerome, to “honor one of its most illustrious citizens.”

So, if you ever asked those two questions while in the park, now you know!

Audrey Wicklander, Museum Assistant

**Images of Bishop Park in the 1920's  
From the Museum Archives**



**A Walk Through History  
In the Land of Bishop Park**

A long time ago, "The Land" to become Bishop Park was marshy and the fresh waters of the river lapped up to the gently sloped river bank, before the wooded area inland. The Land provided fish, deer, bear, partridges, nuts, and fruits for the Wyandots living north, cultivating the fertile, loam soil (what in now Oak St. to Eureka, Biddle to the river).

Fast forward to 1818... the Wyandots cede their land to the U.S. Government and Major Biddle is the highest bidder for about 2,200 acres (including "The Land") via an auction held by the U.S. Government. Major Biddle acquires the acreage to become a "gentleman farmer" like George Washington at Mount Vernon. However, he is not suited to the role and sells his "Wyandotte" estate to Eureka Iron Company.

While the river provides accessible transportation for the Eureka Iron Company, "The Land" provides a dumping ground for their cinders. The company thrives and in 1864 the first ingots of steel in the U.S. are rolled via the Bessemer process, at the southern end of "The Land".

Wyandotte continues growing as a village and streets are planned per the Philadelphia pattern. The first boundary along the river (and "The Land") is named Front Street; streets running parallel to it are named numerically i.e. First etc., and streets running horizontal to it are named after trees and plants i.e. Oak, Chestnut, Vine, etc.

Wyandotte incorporates as a city in 1867 and more people affect "The Land" historically:

- J.H. Bishop founds a tannery along the river that extends from Chestnut, north to Superior in 1875
- After the closing of of the Eureka Iron Works in 1892, the area from Eureka Ave. to Elm St. is platted into lots and that section of Front Street is renamed Van Alstyne Blvd., in honor of the first mayor of Wyandotte. Later in 1921 the rest of Front St. is renamed to Van Alstyne Blvd.
- Captain John B. Ford founds Michigan Alkali Company and in 1900 the Michigan Alkali Clubhouse (now the American Legion) is dedicated with the success of the chemical business in Wyandotte

Once the city of Wyandotte owns "The Land" as a park, the first pavilion is built; a wading pool is donated by the Garden Club, and the Log Cabin for Old Timers is placed on the river bank in 1942.

The evolution of Bishop Park continued, but alas, I am out of space to reminisce about it. Take a walk in Bishop Park. Imagine what has been and what is to be...

Jane (Gies) Rasmussen

**ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL****Distinguished Graduate****Leo Stevenson****Class of 1974**

Leo Stevenson distinguished himself in the business and finance sector as the Managing Director and Senior Resident Director of the Wyandotte Merrill Lynch office and as an active contributor to many



scholarships for Wyandotte Public Schools students. Stevenson earned his B.A. degree from Michigan State University in 1978 with a major in Financial Administration.

Mr. Stevenson was a 1974 graduate of Roosevelt High School. He earned numerous varsity letters during his four years attending Roosevelt and was a member of the inaugural golf team. The passion that Mr. Stevenson had for business was evident at an early age when he was able to assist his teacher, Mr. Folbaum, in teaching the investment section of a business class.

Upon graduation, Mr. Stevenson continued his education at Michigan State University. While at Michigan State, he earned a degree in financial administration which would send him on his career path. After graduating from college, Mr. Stevenson returned to Wyandotte with his sights set on setting up roots in the only city he had called home.

He began by working at BASF in the accounting department and then later at Diversify. When he opened up a Merrill Lynch office in 1999, the vision that began as a young boy to contribute to his community began to take shape. Since 1999, over 2,000 clients have entrusted nearly \$1 billion in

assets to Mr. Stevenson's firm.

He has received many awards from his peers in the financial world. He was given the Top Financial Advisor Award in the State of Michigan by Forbes Magazine in 2018 and 2019. Mr. Stevenson was named to Barron's list of the top 1200 Financial Advisors in the United States for the last six years. He has also trained over 500 financial advisors across the United States in investment philosophy and practice management.

Mr. Stevenson was not satisfied to rest on his accomplishments in the business sector; he has also given back to Wyandotte and many Downriver communities. Through his personal philanthropy, he has donated more than \$1 million to various organizations. He began the Doris and Leo Stevenson scholarship for Roosevelt students in honor of his parents. He also endowed a \$250,000 scholarship for Roosevelt students who attend Michigan State University. Other organizations which have benefited from Mr. Stevenson's philanthropy include: the Downriver Guidance Center, Michigan State University, University of Michigan Cardiology Department and the Pallotine Fathers in Wyandotte. Mr. Stevenson has been involved in various community organizations, including; the Wyandotte Downtown Development Authority, Salvation Army, Mt. Carmel Finance Committee and a board member of the Grosse Ile Golf and Country Club. Mr. Stevenson has been a pillar in the Downriver community for many years and has always been fortunate to call Wyandotte home.

Leo and his wife, Marie, have been lifelong Downriver residents. They have six children and four grandchildren. They are both thankful that they can say they are from Wyandotte.

George Purdu

Return Service Requested

**Wyandotte Historical Society**

Burns Home

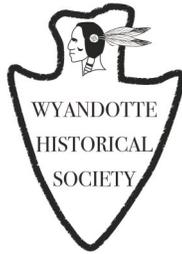
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**UPCOMING EVENTS!**

- The Wyandotte Stars Annual Home Classic is scheduled for August 28.
- The Fall City Wide Garage Sale is scheduled for September 10, 11 & 12.
- The Historic Cemetery Walk is scheduled for October 15 & 16
- The Halloween Open House is scheduled for October 22.
- Festive Fridays are scheduled for December 3, 10, & 17

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