

A History of Long Park

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The idea of giving land to the city of Lancaster for a public park had long been a desire of Judge Henry Grimly Long. Judge Long, son of a local business man, served in the Pennsylvania Bar Association in 1827; was appointed prothonotary of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; and in 1838 was a member of the State Legislature. Judge Long by inheritance and legal earnings acquired a large estate. By his will he made provisions for the erection of a public park for the city of Lancaster. The death of his daughter, Catharine H. Long, made the land and money available for this purpose to the city of Lancaster in 1900.¹

The legacy left to the city, as I discovered it in the will of Catharine H. Long, was quite sizeable. It included a valuable farm of about seventy acres, known as the Bomberger Farm, in Manheim Township, beyond the Dillerville Road, and along the Harrisburg Pike, and about one mile northwest of the city limits. The farm was given in trust to the city of Lancaster for the purpose of a public park, and to be made into a popular resort for the pleasure and health of the people. Also given in the will was \$200,000 to be invested for a yearly income for park maintenance. The will also set up the Long Park Commission with the Mayor as chairman to manage the park.²

Of course, as could be expected, there were those who could only see the bad side of things, and many people regreted that the park was to be so far from the center of town. But Lancaster had no large tract of land within the city upon which to build a park, and it was felt that if the city continued its expansion toward the northwest as it had for the past thirty years, that the next generation would be but a short distance from the park.³ Of course this has come true. There were also well-verified rumors that the gift of land to the city would be contested by some of the heirs of the Long estate. But it was felt certain that with the help of the law department of the city, the Park Commission, and the Executors, that the issue would be quickly settled in favor of the Municipality and in the interests of its citizens.⁴

In the early days of the park, as related by the first park superintendent, J. E. Fortney, to a *New Era* reporter, "the Harrisburg Turnpike was full of chuck-holes and Lancaster was a lengthy and leisurely carriage ride away. But things began to change when the first Long Park Commission got to work. The neighbors found a new source of income in part-time labor on the big job of planting and grading the old farm into a new park. . . ." A small brook passing into the area was transformed into a lake. The barn was torn down and so were the old fences. Men plowed the land and worked with rakes and hoes to plant shrubs and grass seed. The shade trees grew so thick that many shrubs died from the lack of sunlight, and the trees had to be thinned.⁵

For years not many people went to the park, because there was nothing there to attract them. Eventually, the first pavilion was built in 1913 at a cost of \$3,890. It is still the main pavilion used today. Later, in 1919, a greenhouse was built at the caretaker's house at a cost of \$4,746. For years Long Park was well-known for its decorative plantings of flowers near the entrance to the park and near the caretaker's house. The purpose of the greenhouse was to replenish dead shrubs and flowers. However, the greenhouse has since been demolished because it was costing more to raise new plants than to buy them. The original farmhouse was used for years as a tea room until 1931, when it was converted into a second pavilion at a cost of \$4,650. This pavilion is also still in use today.⁶

Eventually, people with their autos and buggies started to go to the park, and as Fortney told it, "the business represented a large portion of the income to the tollgate on the Harrisburg Pike. It cost a nickel to go out through the gates to the park, and a nickel more to come back to town. They come to swat tennis balls on the sixteen courts; to play a round of golf on the nine hole course, or maybe just to keep cool and quiet and look at the flowers, of which there's usually a grand display." He added that outings were so heavy in 1939 that picnic dates at the park were booked full all through the month of August.⁷

As the years passed, other activities began to take place at the park, and in 1949, the Lancaster City Council decided to open the lake to the children for fishing during the months of July and August. The plan was to be supervised by the Lancaster Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the lake to be restocked after the program was over.⁸ However, the fishermen had bad habits and left dead bait on the land, and spoiled food and dead fish on the water. Disaster then struck a flock of ducks that lived on the lake, and almost caused the fishing program to come to an end, when 128 ducks of an original 170 ducks died of ptomaine poisoning. Death of the ducks was caused by the debris left by the fishermen.⁹

In the following year (1950), another disaster struck at the park. The County Court of 1933 had declared that the original bond investments were not legal trust investments, and thus forced their sale on the open market. The money from the sale of these bonds had been reinvested in mortgages. Then after World War II sufficient mortgages could not be found, and the money, invested in bonds, brought a lower interest rate of about two percent. Although Long Park is privately maintained, the city of Lancaster spent \$32,000 on the park during the period of 1945 to 1950 to help lighten

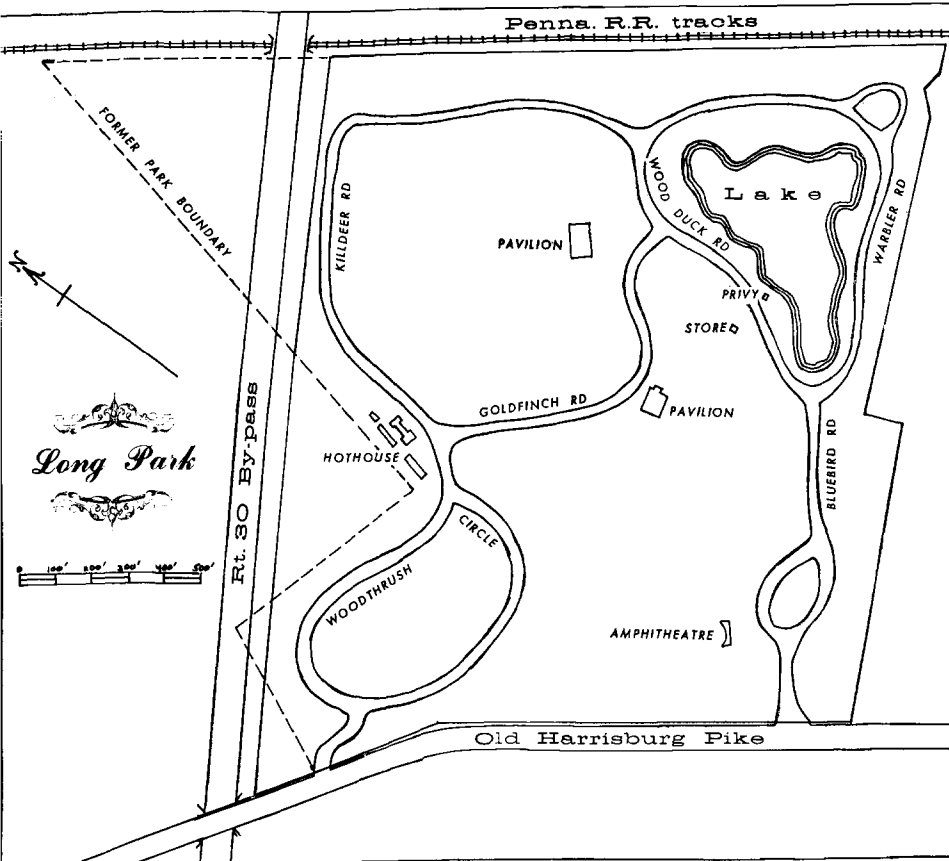
the financial burden. However, because of dwindling income and the rising costs of maintenance the park was in bad need of repair.¹⁰ Two tennis courts had been macadamized in 1950, while the rest were overgrown with weeds.¹¹ Swings were broken, the lake clogged with silt, and a drinking fountain was broken by vandals. The golf course was also covered with weeds, and more picnic tables were needed. The need for additional income spurred the Lancaster Jaycees to sponsor a baseball game with all proceeds for the park.¹²

In view of the financial state of Long Park, Mayor Bare in April of 1952, announced plans for the annexation of the park to the city.¹³ The park was surveyed and found to be 74.44 acres.¹⁴ (As I discovered this was probably the first time that an accurate survey of the park was ever made). Mayor Bare pointed out that the move was based upon tax and cost factors, and for better policing of the area.¹⁵ That same year the Sertoma Club of Lancaster took on the project of repairing the park, and began by refurbishing benches. They used funds from a circus which they sponsored in the summer of 1951 for this purpose.¹⁶ By 1955, the Sertoma Club had helped to pay for an electric lighting system around the lake for skaters.¹⁷ The previous year they had helped to pay for a new water system for the park.¹⁸ In the years prior to 1958, the park's water came from a spring on the grounds, but by February of 1958 the park was receiving all its water from the city, when water mains from the city to the park were completed. The spring was then diverted to the lake to help maintain its water level.¹⁹ The Sertoma Club of Lancaster had done much to beautify Long Park, and in September of 1955, it worked along with city officials to further clean up the park and to erect a sign at the park's entrance.²⁰

The following year (1956), the Long Park Commission announced that because of the lack of use, the golf course at the park would be eliminated to provide more space for baseball diamonds, volley ball courts, a playground for children, and the safety to the increasing number of picnickers.²¹

Shortly after abandoning the park golf course the Long Park Commission adopted new regulations for the use of the park. "Prohibited in the new rules are: bringing alcoholic beverages onto park grounds, fishing except in conjunction with an authorized program, discharging firearms and other weapons, golfing, damaging park property or grounds, washing or polishing of vehicles, parking in non-designated areas, picking flowers or removing branches, any dangerous act, littering, and playing baseball except on the baseball areas. . . ." Also tennis shoes must be worn on tennis courts.²²

In the ensuing year (1958), the Sertoma Club of Lancaster contributed \$800 towards the construction of two new parking lots.²³ Then in 1959, the Park Commission approved the use of the park lake for boating safety and junior angler programs by the Red Cross and The Junior Chamber of Commerce.²⁴ The park Commission also abandoned the use of vending machines in the park that year because they were frequently jammed by slugs and required constant repair.²⁵ The Sertoma Club also opposed a proposed park fee that year which Mayor Monaghan said would be used for park improvement. The proposed fee was never approved. This



may be because the Sertoma Club sponsors an annual chicken barbecue in the park as a fund raising-event for the development of the park.²⁶ It may be well to note that during this period of time the park was averaging an estimated 10,000 visitors or more on Sundays during the summer.²⁷

Again, in 1961, disaster struck at the park when the State of Pennsylvania announced plans for a Route Thirty by-pass. The by-pass would separate 3.92 acres from the main portion of the park and reduce the total acreage of the park from 74.44 acres to 68.59 acres.²⁸ Also lost would be about 200 valuable trees and the use of a large parking lot which lies within that portion of the park which was cut off from the main acreage.²⁹

Then in the following year (1962), Lancaster's musical culture was increased by the addition of an amphitheatre at the park. It was built for open-air concerts, and space was provided on the lawn for almost 10,000 people to sit.³⁰ The Amphitheatre, built at a cost of about \$65,000, was honored at its dedication by a speech delivered by Thomas J. Monaghan, State Secretary of Commerce, for Governor David L. Lawrence of Pennsylvania. A program entitled Day of Music was presented for eleven hours, and involved 600 musicians, who attracted a crowd of about 50,000 people. A noted celebrity in the show was Vaughn Monroe, and featured in the evening was the United States Air Force Band.³¹ The following year the Day of Music program had an attendance of about 25,000 people and the United States Air Force Band again performed.³²

Much work went into the building of the Amphitheatre, and many local groups raised money for its construction. The Sertoma Club of Lancaster raised much needed money with its annual chicken barbecue in 1963. They made a profit of almost \$10,000 and sold 15,175 meals with ten tons of chicken.³³

NOTES

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3. **Ibid.**, p. 32.
4. **Ibid.**, p. 33.
5. "Public is Heir to Long Family Fortune," [The Lancaster] **Sunday News**, Sept. 3, 1939, pp. 13-14. Hereafter cited as the **Sunday News**.
6. "Once Neglected Long Park Now Draws Big Crowds," [The] **Lancaster New Era**, Aug. 5, 1959, p. 32 and p. 28. Hereafter cited as the **New Era**.
7. "Public is Heir to Long Family Fortune," **Sunday News**, Sept. 3, 1939, pp. 13-14.
8. "City to Allow Kiddies to Fish in Long Park," **New Era**, June 14, 1949, p. 1.
9. "Fate of Long Park Fishing Uncertain as 128 Ducks Die," **New Era**, July 25, 1949, p. 1.
10. "Lack of Funds Hits Long Park," **New Era**, July 10, 1950, p. 22.
11. "Long Park in Poor Condition for Picnics," **New Era**, June 21, 1951, p. 1.
12. "Long Park Work is Outlined," **New Era**, June 22, 1951, p. 1.
13. "85-Acre Long Park Will be Brought Inside City Limits," **New Era**, April 4, 1952, p. 1.
14. Information obtained from a survey map of Long Park of 1952, and interpreted to the author by Mr. Thomas Shirk, City Engineer, Nov. 16, 1963.
15. "85-Acre Long Park Will Be Brought Inside City Limits," **New Era**, April 4, 1952, p. 1.
16. "Long Park to Get Parking Area," **New Era**, Dec. 15, 1952, p. 5.
17. "Lights for Skaters Planned for the Lake at Long Park," **New Era**, Dec. 1, 1955, p. 21.
18. "Long Park to Get New Water System," **New Era**, Sept. 30, 1954, p. 7.
19. "City Water Extended to Long Park Mains," **New Era**, Feb. 4, 1958, p. 6.
20. "Men, Money and Time Being Spent at Long Park," **Sunday News**, Sept. 11, 1955, p. 48.
21. "Long Park to Turn Golf Course Into Play Areas," **New Era**, April 13, 1956, p. 3.
22. "New Rules Set at Long Park," **New Era**, Jan. 25, 1957, p. 16.
23. "2 Parking Lots for Long Park," **New Era**, April 18, 1958, p. 11.
24. "All-Night Long Park Lights," **New Era**, April 17, 1959, p. 24.
25. "Park to Drop Vending Machines," **New Era**, Oct. 16, 1959, p. 1.
26. "Sertoma Fights Long Park Fee," **New Era**, July 31, 1959, p. 1.
27. "Once Neglected Long Park Now Draws Big Crowds," **New Era**, Aug: 5, 1959, p. 32 and p. 28.
28. Information obtained from a state survey map of the proposed Route Thirty bypass; affecting Long Park, and interpreted to author by Mr. Thomas Shirk, City Engineer, Nov. 16, 1963.
29. "Park Seeks Value of 200 Trees," **New Era**, Sept. 8, 1961, p. 5.
30. Frederic S. Klein (Prof.) "Cultural Assets of Lancaster," **Pennsylvania Dutch Guide-Book**. ed. A Special Committee of the Pennsylvania Dutch Tourist Bureau. Lancaster, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania Dutch Tourist Bureau, 1962, p. 35.
31. "50,000 Rock'N'Loll at Amphitheatre," **Sunday News**, May 27, 1962, p. 1. and p. 27.
32. "25,000 Jam Park for Day of Music," **New Era**, Sept. 2, 1963, p. 1.
33. "Barbecue Nets \$10,000 for Long Park," **New Era**, July 30, 1963, p. 22.