

THE STEWART PARK STORY

PART I: 1894-1915

by John M. Bacon

Stewart Park has been the subject of a long and often contentious planning process aimed at producing a master plan to improve the park's current state and to ensure its future. Opinions concerning the need for and nature of this plan have differed widely in the Ithaca community. This divergence of opinion is reflected in the many ways the community uses the park. Some visitors simply drive in and admire the view of the lake from their cars; others fish in the lagoon and Fall Creek. Families and groups find the park a good place to picnic; rowers can launch their shells from the Cascadilla boathouse. The landscape and structures at Stewart Park are adapted to these uses and have evolved over a long period. The history of this evolution should be explored now in the park's maturity, before it is further transformed. This history may also help inform and direct the current planning process.

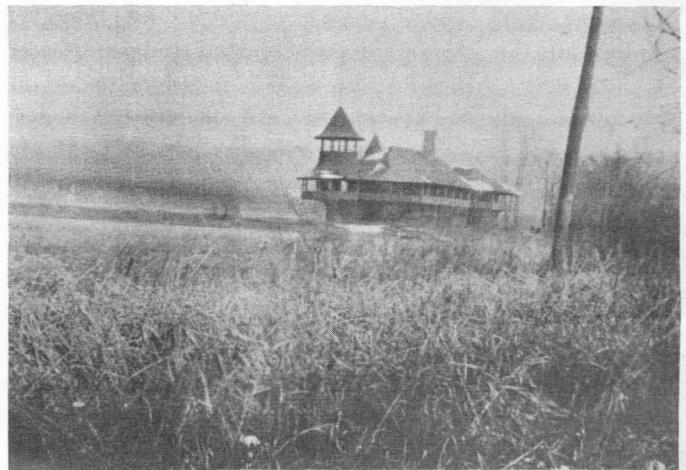
The land on which Stewart Park sits is swampy and lies at the junction of several waterways and Lake Cayuga. The Moody-Renwick tract (originally number 88 in the town of Ulysses) and the Parker tract (number 87) immediately to the west were largely wooded swampland, subject to flooding and home to disease-carrying insects. Indians and early settlers avoided the marshy lowlands around the base of the lake and settled at the foot of the surrounding hills. The eastern portion of the Moody-Renwick tract rose sharply at the corner of the lake; it was here that the hamlet of Port Renwick developed (it was also referred to as Corner of the Lake or simply Renwick). This port was active in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, less so after the steamboat landing moved to the Inlet after 1827. Communication with the village of Ithaca was via stagecoach and wagon. L. Fagan's 1853 Tompkins County map shows "Renwick" stretched along Lake Road; "C. Devenport" kept a tavern on the west side opposite school number 12. The land to the west is indicated as swamp with no improvements, but early accounts indicate that it was a popular spot for horse racing. Members of the Renwick family maintained a residence farther down Lake Road, closer to Fall Creek and the village center. The Cayuga Lake railroad reached the hamlet in the 1870s, but the port was inactive by this time. The hamlet had simply become a stop on the road to Lansing, Auburn, and the north.

The development of the park itself began with two separate events in the early 1890s. First, the Cascadilla School bought the northeastern portion of the Parker tract and constructed an athletic complex on it. Second, and more important, the Cayuga Lake Electric Railway Company was formed in February 1894 and constructed a trolley line to the lake, where the company created a trolley amusement park. Thus in the space of a few years, the shore of the lake between Fall Creek and Renwick was developed for athletic and recreational use and made accessible to the community. These two separate, private initia-

tives would determine the nature of the subsequently united, public park.

The Cascadilla School purchased thirteen acres between Fall Creek and Lake Cayuga sometime before 1893. The school had been established in the 1870s to prepare students to enter Cornell, traditionally a rowing power. The lakeside site was ideally suited for rowing; in fact, Cornell maintained its own boathouse just down Fall Creek. Cascadilla School commissioned the Ithaca architects Clinton L. Vivian and Arthur N. Gibb to design a large boathouse/gymnasium in 1893. As part of the commission, the architects were to travel to the Atlantic coast to study other boathouse designs. Early in 1894 their design was made public and elicited the following description in the 20 January *Ithaca Daily Journal*: "The building is a picturesque two-story, oblong structure, surrounded by wide verandas, the roof being broken up into peaks and towers. It is a frame building, the second story and the roof being shingled. The interior is finished in natural pine. The greatest length is one hundred eight feet; its greatest breadth eighty feet." Sited at the junction of Fall Creek and the lake, the boathouse (completed in 1896) was one of the most successful examples of Shingle-Style design in Ithaca. Vivian and Gibb had both apprenticed to William Henry Miller, Ithaca's most prominent nineteenth-century architect. Their partnership was formed in 1892 and succeeded in attracting important commissions, such as the Ithaca (now Tompkins County) Trust Company office block (1895). They continued to work together until 1900.

The Cascadilla School boathouse, c. 1900. This view illustrates the dramatic silhouette of the 1893 design. The open tower and most of the cantilevered veranda have been removed, and the bird pond now occupies the marshy land to the left of the boathouse. This and following photographs courtesy of the DeWitt Historical Society.



The boathouse survives in diminished form today and continues to anchor the end of Fall Creek. The Cascadilla School also cleared most of its land and created a running track; the western loop of the present park road roughly follows the outline of this track. Besides these physical remainders, the use of the site for athletics and specifically rowing has continued to the present day.

The land between the Cascadilla School athletic facility and Port Renwick was developed beginning in 1894 by the Cayuga Lake Electric Railway Company. The impetus for development was the revival of steamboat travel on the lake. One Mr. Darragh, who owned several Cayuga steamers, announced that he would build a long pier at Port Renwick if the street railway would build out that far. This idea was formalized by the creation of the Cayuga Lake Electric Railway in February 1894. The incorporators were Horace E. Hand of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Herman Bergholtz of Ithaca. These two men had bought control of the local street railway and electric light systems in December 1891. Hand was the financier and Bergholtz, an electrical engineer, supervised the businesses. The Cayuga Lake branch was incorporated separately so that it could function as a seasonal line; the Ithaca Street Railway was obligated by its franchise agreements to operate year-round. Thus the seasonal nature of the enterprise was established from the start, before plans for a park were drawn up.

Hand and Bergholtz purchased the Renwick tract after they had received a franchise to build a trolley line from Tioga and Fall Streets to Port Renwick in April 1894. As Richard Kerr relates in *The Ithaca Street Railway* (1972), "The Ithaca promoters took this opportunity to follow another popular trend in America in that era: trolley companies had been building amusement parks at remote locations, and then they built a convenient electric line to the park, thus fostering fares from the cars as well as the park itself" (p. 12). The promoters chose forty acres of land between the hamlet of Port Renwick and the Cascadilla School property for the park itself. They also had plans for other portions of the Renwick tract. The hillside to the east was to contain both a new cemetery and an exclusive residential suburb. Plans for structures and landscaping at the new "Renwick Park" and for the "Lake View Cemetery" were commissioned soon after the purchase of the land. Work began in the early summer and continued into the fall; the incomplete park opened to the public in late June and on July Fourth, 12,000 people jammed its forty acres. Thus the Renwick tract left that family's ownership after 104 years and was made the center of intense activity. As the *Journal* noted on 3 April, "It is hoped to eventually make the lake at this point so attractive as to bring more excursions to it in a single season than have heretofore favored Ithaca as an objective point in many years together." Hand and Bergholtz did retain one link to the past by hiring James Jeffrey Renwick, the great-grandson of James Renwick, as park supervisor.

The landscape planning for the new park, cemetery, and suburb was largely the work of William Webster of Rochester. The 7 July 1894 *Journal* noted among other Ren-

wick Park news that "Landscape Engineer Webster is daily expected to lay out the road in the park, two north and south boulevards above the lake road on the hill; and direct the preliminary work on Lakeview cemetery." Webster is presumably the same landscape architect noted in the 3 July edition as having planned "Elmsford," another suburb financed by Hand near Scranton. In any case, Webster received \$207.16 on 6 October 1894 from Hand and Bergholtz for "services" in preparing plans for the park and cemetery. Henry Abt in his history *Ithaca* (1926) asserted that the design was "laid out by a landscape artist of the firm that planned Central Park in New York City" (p. 132), but there is no evidence to support this. Webster may have been associated with Frederick Law Olmsted at some time, but this cannot be verified. Further research may answer this question more clearly; a signed and dated survey or plan could solve it definitively.

Given Webster as designer, it remains difficult to know what his design included. A formal entrance garden stood south and east of the main group of buildings where the trolley deposited visitors, while the land south of the tracks was left wooded. The 27 April *Journal* noted: "Mr. Webster has directed all trees and shrubs to be removed from that portion lying west of the dancing pavilion. He says there must be a treeless lawn, with tennis courts and croquet fields. He says that trees over abundant become so common as to lose their beauty. That sunshine and shadow may be too finely interlaced." This course of action did not please the *Journal* writer, but he continued, "That is a professional vagary, perhaps; but he is our doctor and we must take down the trees." A carriage entry and road were placed along the lakeshore; lawns and later a trolley turn-around were placed between this road and the tracks to the south. The overall design then appears to have combined formal and picturesque elements in the Olmsted style. Several Ithaca clients were impressed enough by the design to hire Webster. The most important of these commissions was the Cascadilla Place entrance to Cornell (1896), which included an arch designed by William Henry Miller at the top of Eddy Street. In 1895, Webster was also involved in the design of a trolley park in Cortland.

The design of the park structures has been securely attributed to the firm of Vivian and Gibb. Their involvement may have led from their design work for the Cascadilla School boathouse; in any case, they were among the leading architects in Ithaca at the time. The design of the structures was rapid. The 11 May *Journal* stated, "A handsome series of designs for the proposed buildings at Renwick Park have been prepared and submitted to the management, upon its order, by Messrs. Vivian & Gibb." Stephen M. Oltz was named contractor for their construction on 10 June (he performed the same role in the construction of the Cascadilla boathouse). By 2 August, the restaurant pavilion was completed. Work on the pier progressed apace. The 7 July *Journal* noted: "Such rapid and efficient work as has been done by the Darragh triphammer pile driver has never before been witnessed on Cayuga Lake. The hammer weighs 2,200 lbs., and it works faster than it can be



Eastern end of Renwick Park from the tower, c. 1896-1900. Trolleys entered the park to the right, while carriages were driven along the shore. Sometime around 1900, much of the middle ground in this picture was taken up by a fenced trolley turn-around.

supplied with piles to drive." The rapid development of the site allowed it to open for visitors in late June. Response from the Ithaca community was enthusiastic and excursions from Binghamton and other cities also visited the park in its first summer.

The summer of 1895 saw the completion of the dancing pavilion, water tower, bandstand, and other structures. The 27 May *Journal* informed its readers that "Contractor Oltz assures us that the band stand at Renwick Park will be finished in time for concert use on Memorial Day." Work also recommenced on the dancing pavilion and the water tower. The 20 July *Journal* described the opening of the dancing pavilion: "The Ithaca Band discoursed excellent music and a goodly company enjoyed 'tripping the light fantastic toe' until a late hour. The crowd of onlookers was large." The water tower, pier boathouses, and concession stand (or "tea-house") were completed in August. On the third of that month, the *Journal* had published the plan and north (lakeside) elevation of the main building group. The trolley stopped to the south of the tower. The pavilions flanked the tower on either side on axis with the lakeshore. The arrangement of the two main pavilions and water tower on three sides of a court was both simple and effective; the bandstand stood on the north (lake) side of the court. The whole group afforded excellent views of the lake, and the tower provided a reference point to those entering by trolley as well those on the lake or the pier. The latter was constructed several hundred feet to the east and thus did not interfere with the composition. The only design element that was not constructed was a semicircular colonnade or "peristyle" to connect the tower to the pavilions and partially enclose the court.

The *Journal* lamented this fact as late as 8 June 1897: "The colonnade to connect the pavilions may not be built this summer." But even without the colonnade, the plan was strong and the buildings well-suited to their roles. Vivian and Gibb were able to combine formal, Beaux-Arts planning concepts with suprisingly simple, shingled structures. David Rash, in "The Works of Clinton L. Vivian,

Architect, of Ithaca" (Master of Architectural History thesis, Cornell University, in process), suggests that the origins of this design may be seen in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Vivian is known to have visited the exposition and may well have consciously recalled the elements of its Court of Honor in his design for Renwick Park. Rash also compares the design of the Renwick pavilions with that of Charles Atwood's Forestry Building at the exposition. These comparisons, given the difference in scale, demonstrate the power and urbanity of the Vivian and Gibb design.

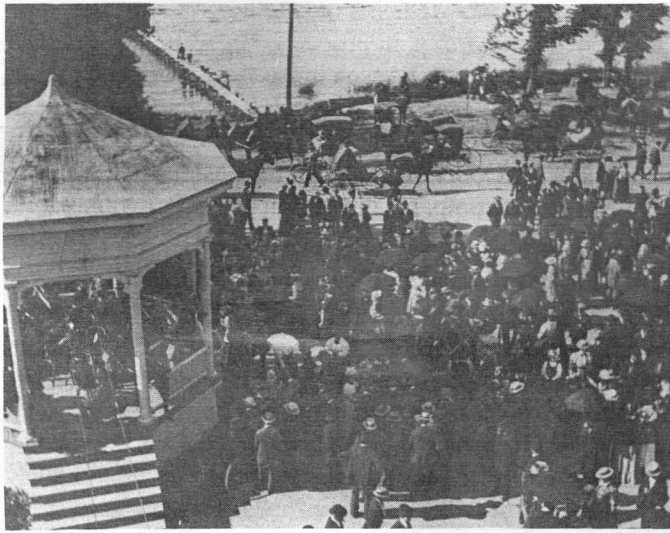
Thus by 1896 the park was largely completed. Its popularity was charted by the *Journal* in a series of columns, titled variously "Renwickiana," "Renwick Beach Spray," "Renwick Notes," and the like. Swimming, band music, picnicing, and dancing were the primary amusements in early accounts. Changes and additions were made yearly to enhance the park and encourage visitation. A stage was added to the dancing pavilion in 1896, thus creating Ithaca's first vaudeville theater. In 1898, the introduction of a projection booth made the theater the first in Ithaca to show motion pictures. Later still the pavilion was used for roller skating. A separate bowling alley, additional concession stands (including a photography studio), and a merry-go-round were constructed in the late 1890s. These new structures clustered south and southwest of the dancing pavilion, where a menagerie was also created. The 20 May 1899 *Journal* noted, "Several foxes have just been presented to the zoo and added to the fox family already at the park. The herd of deer are having great sport in their excellent enclosure; they cannot eat the sweet grass as fast as it grows." Thus the range and variety of amusements increased. In 1902 there was even thought of bringing a Ferris wheel and other mechanical rides into the park, but this plan was not realized.

Edith Horton gives a vivid impression of the park in her memoir, *A Child of the Nineties* (Ithaca, 1971). Describing amusements of the day, she calls the band concerts at Renwick "best of all:"

With your family you walked up to Tioga Street and stood waiting importantly for the street-car. Once aboard you went bumping along happily, past the houses, past Percy Field, the smell of the lake growing stronger, around the curve, and there it was, Renwick! You climbed down and ran to find the best table for the picnic. There you put the basket and unpacked it. There were bears to feed, and deer, slender and startled, and a chattering monkey who was always eating peanuts. After you had eaten twilight fell, the sunset turning the lake to rose, then came night, the sound of lapping water, and the twinkling of many lights. The Band climbed into the round stand, Mr. Conway raised his baton, and unforgettable music floated out across the darkness. Row-boats and canoes glided in and out of the shadows near the shore. (pp. 6-7)

In its first years, the park was an enjoyable and evocative place for both the young and the old.

The park continued to evolve in the first years of the new century but proved increasingly unprofitable. During



The band stand and court from the tower, c. 1900. This view illustrates a Sunday at Renwick like that Edith Horton describes in her memoir. Note the carriage traffic and parking along the lakeshore and the small fishing pier at left.

the 1900 season, many of the small outbuildings were moved and the menagerie relocated to the west of the lagoon. Rapid growth of trees led to "thinning out" efforts intended to preserve only the best shade trees. The beach had to be continually cleaned of debris, and efforts to control erosion were constant. A large raised flower bed with a protective moat was planted in the center of the park and reputed to be the "largest in the county." Frequent references to ruffians indicate that the park was attracting all elements of the community. A statement from the 6 June 1900 *Journal* is typical: "The management has decided to warn off all notorious characters, and has begun it already. A man who was intoxicated on the grounds during a recent concert by the band was led from the park by an officer and warned not to be seen there again under the influence of liquor."

The management had passed to Edward G. Wyckoff in 1899 after he purchased the Ithaca Street Railway from Bergholtz and Hand in 1898. Litigation between these two parties almost closed the park for the 1899 season, but an agreement was reached in May. The 1 May *Journal* noted that park visitors "were heard in couples and groups discussing the subject of keeping the park and its buildings idle and closed during the summer. Many of them earnestly expressed the hope that the street car company might soon be in control of the park and nobody seemed to oppose it." In 1906, Wyckoff initiated a loop route through his Cornell and Cayuga Heights developments that connected with the old Cayuga Lake Electric Railway line at Renwick. This service was popular for only a year and then discontinued. Wyckoff in turn sold the Ithaca Street Railway and Renwick Park to Albert H. Flint of New York City in 1908. Flint, sensing that the trolley amusement park was a passing fad, promptly sold it back to a group of local men. The

Cayuga Lake Electric Railway Company was effectively dissolved, and Renwick Park was no longer associated with the Ithaca Street Railway Company. The Flint interests themselves were declared insolvent in 1912. The street railway had reached its peak in the 1900-10 period, and the emergence of the automobile cut into ridership in the decades that followed.

The local men incorporated as the Renwick Park and Traffic Association. Edward G. Wyckoff and several of his partners in land speculation were among the incorporators. Their interest appears to have been civic, while at the same time protecting and enhancing their developments in the heights to the east. The park was open in these years, and unsuccessful attempts were made to increase visitation. Community interest waned, as reflected in the dearth of Renwick articles in the *Journal*. Flint had been right—the trolley amusement park was dated. Whatever civic role it aspired to, the Renwick Park and Traffic Association could not afford to maintain the park and keep it open for visitors. Sometime before 1915, trolley access to the park was discontinued. The 5 April 1915 *Journal* summed up the situation: "That the loss of Renwick Park will be of no great consequence to the city is evidenced by the meager patronage given the resort last summer after many thousands of dollars had been expended in improvements. Years ago Renwick Park was very popular but recently it has failed to draw the people."

While the future of the park was uncertain, fifty-five acres immediately to the south were set aside as a bird sanctuary. Sometime in 1913, the land was presented to the City of Ithaca by Renwick descendants—it was the last significant portion of the 1790 tract to remain in their hands. The sanctuary was christened as the "Renwick Wildwood" and maintained by the Cayuga Bird Club. The club developed a system of trails and constructed a concrete arch at the southern entrance in 1917. These projects were funded by the city's Board of Public Works, but executed with volunteer labor. The president of the club at the time was the artist-naturalist Louis Agassiz Fuertes. After his death in 1927, the sanctuary was renamed in his honor. The sanctuary has remained largely untouched since that time and continues to shelter many species of wildlife.

Historic Ithaca is currently working with the City of Ithaca's Landmarks Preservation Commission to develop a detailed history of the buildings and landscapes that make up Stewart Park. It is expected that this research will result in the nomination of part or all of the park for Local Landmark status. Historic Ithaca would welcome any information or photographs—particularly of the film era—which would help to tell the Stewart Park story. Members and friends with information are encouraged to call the Historic Ithaca office at 273-6633.

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THE STEWART PARK STORY

PART II: 1915-1987

by John M. Bacon

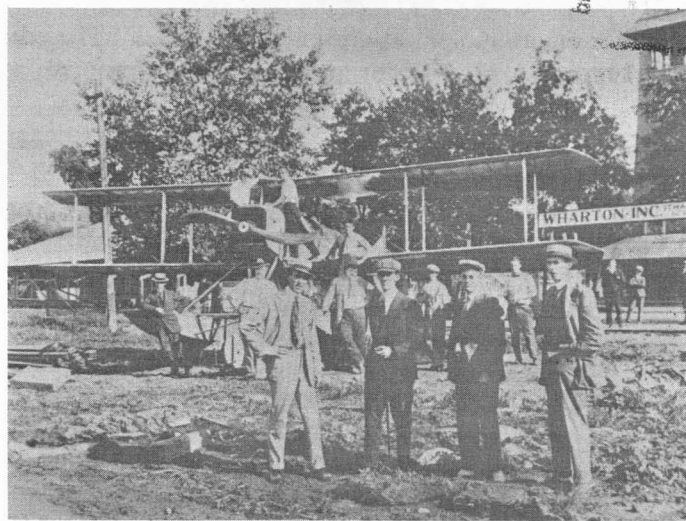
The park itself closed in 1915 and in that year was leased for five years to Leopold and Theodore Wharton for use as a motion picture studio. The Wharton and other studios occupied the park as tenants until 1920. Leopold Wharton told *Journal* readers on 25 May 1915, "We are perfectly willing that Ithacans may come to the park, provided that they do not interfere with our work. We have no desire to close the park to the public if the privilege is not abused." Interestingly, public interest in the studio and the stars it brought to Ithaca was as intense and short-lived as that for the original Renwick Park in the 1890s. The Whartons had originally been drawn to Ithaca in 1913, planning to film the collegiate atmosphere of Cornell for their film "Dear Old Girl of Mine." The natural beauty of the area led them to stay. They maintained studios in several locations before leasing the Renwick Park site. Several film serials were filmed in Ithaca, including 9 of the 36 episodes of "The Exploits of Elaine" with Pearl White and Lionel Barrymore. During World War I, the Wharton Studio produced the 15-episode "Patria" serial starring Irene Castle. Other Wharton films included "The Mysteries of Myra," "The Great White Trail," and "The Eagle's Eye." The latter was subtitled "An Exposure of the Imperial German Government's Intrigue in America" and served (like "Patria") as wartime propaganda. The studio was sublet to International Films and the Grossman Studios in 1918-19. Their productions included the "Beatrix Fairfax" series and "The Secret of the Storm Country." The latter was based on Grace Miller White's novel of life around Cayuga Lake and starred Norma Talmadge.

Most of these films used the dramatic scenery of the gorges and lake, along with interiors shot in the studio. The dancing pavilion/theater was adapted for this purpose by the stuccoing-over of its arcade. The restaurant pavilion and other structures were used for costume and scenery storage. Several new scenery storage sheds were charted on the 1919 Sanborn map of the site, which also noted that the restaurant pavilion was to become a studio. This plan was never realized, and there is little evidence that the grounds were changed by the Whartons or other park tenants. The last picture produced at the studio by the Whartons was "The Crooked Dagger" in the fall of 1919. The Whartons did not renew their lease the following spring but joined the growing film industry in California. Many of the films themselves remained in Ithaca—at the bottom of Lake Cayuga. This step was taken because of the volatile nature of the film, which contained dangerous levels of nitrates.

The fate of Renwick Park was uncertain after the studios left. The physical plant remained much as it had in the 1890s, with the exception of the alterations to the dancing pavilion/theater and the new storage buildings. The

grounds and landscaping remained largely as Webster had planned them, although overgrown and poorly maintained. The Cascadilla School still owned and maintained its athletic facility immediately to the west. At this juncture, newly elected Ithaca Mayor Edwin C. Stewart became interested in the possibility of creating a lakeside municipal park. In his inauguration speech on 1 January 1920, Stewart stated, "It is a disgrace to our city that there is not a place where Ithacans and their guests may go to enjoy our lake without trespassing on private property." The mayor's interest appeared unselfish and humanitarian; he did not profit from the sale of any land to the city for park purposes, except politically. Instead, he sought to address the need for public recreational space for all Ithacans. At this time, the only municipal parks were De Witt and Washington, both limited in size and use. The gorges and falls in and around the city were not developed as recreational resources until the 1930s. Already by 1919, the population of the city had doubled since 1890. The value of products manufactured in the city rose 500 percent during the same period. The purchase and renovation of the Renwick Park property made sense for the growing city.

The mayor began to act on this proposal soon after his inauguration, but the actual purchase did not occur until the spring of 1921. As early as July 1920, Jared T. Newman wrote to the mayor that he was willing to sell his Renwick properties at cost to further plans for the park. In return, Newman asked for some concessions in the Heights,



Wharton Studios, c. 1915-18. The restaurant pavilion and tower are partly visible in this view. The studio lot was entered from the lakeshore, which had filled in considerably since the mid 1890s. This and following photographs courtesy of the DeWitt Historical Society.

where he had extensive holdings. The mayor's efforts were largely private until January 1921. In that month, Cornell announced that it had purchased 20 acres of the Bergholtz tract and planned to build a biological station on the land. Bergholtz still retained some of the land he and Hand had purchased in 1894, including the Cornell parcel and land in Renwick Heights. Mayor Stewart expressed his satisfaction with this development and stated, "I believe that the time has now arrived when the city can afford to make a beginning and carry out the suggestions that have been made in relation to a park on the lakefront" (6 January 1921 *Journal*). The mayor followed up on this statement in the 26 January edition: "This tract could be purchased for a reasonable price at the present time, and it will be a matter of serious regret if it is not accomplished in the near future. . . . My idea of the conduct of this park in the beginning is to clear up the beach, making it suitable for swimming and boating, keep the grounds in order and do some planting of shrubs and flowers; make inexpensive and necessary repairs to the buildings; open it to the public as soon as possible, and let its further development and improvement await the demands of the future." He continued that the park could be self-sufficient with the proceeds from amusement concessions and encouraged the Rotarians and other citizens to support the project.

The *Journal* was firmly behind the park project. The 27 January editorial read; "Ithaca is far more fortunate than most cities in that it has a lake at its very doors; yet as far as the people of this community are concerned they have no right of access whatever to the lake front and every time they go down to the lake they must trespass on private property. . . . The great need of the park is not for the person who is able to get into an automobile any afternoon or any Sunday and motor wherever the fancy dictates, or the person who spends the summer in a cottage down by the lake. The need for the park is for the mass of the people who can do neither of these things, and whose summer entertainment at present is restricted." The editors supported Mayor Stewart's inexpensive program to renovate the park and to allow for concessions.

Stewart acquired an option to buy the property from the Renwick Park and Traffic Association around this time. The price was set at \$30,000 and was to be paid over a two-year period. This was considered a bargain; Wyckoff had paid \$50,000 for the property in 1899 and thousands more had been spent on improvements. A public hearing was held on 24 February. The *Journal* reported that the park would be purchased: "This decision was forecasted last night at the conclusion of a public hearing in Foster Hall at which several hundred citizens enthusiastically pledged their unanimous approval and hearty support of the plan to acquire the Renwick Park property. Not one voice was actually raised in opposition to the park purchase. The undivided expression of approval was an exceptional demonstration of unanimity in the consideration of a public proposition." The mayor outlined his plan again and mentioned the possibilities of the park for railroad and automobile tourists. Professor J. G. Needham of Cornell

asserted that the purchase would complement the university's plans to build a biology station in the Renwick area. Representatives from the Rotarians, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, and other organizations were fully behind the purchase. A petition signed by 128 workers at the Ithaca Gun Company was presented by H. D. Wilson, an emigrant from England. The *Journal* reported that Mr. Wilson "said Renwick Park should be purchased for the benefit of the poor people of the city alone, stating that they have few other places to go with their families."

Negative reaction to the plan came in the form of letters to Mayor Stewart and the *Journal*. H. Diederichs, a Renwick Heights resident, wrote the mayor on 27 January: "I was considerably surprised to see in the *Journal* that you advocate the letting of amusement concessions in your proposed city park to pay for its upkeep. This is so flatly contradictory to what you told me your ideas were about this thing that it leaves me only one thing to do, and that is to fight this proposition tooth and nail." Diederichs did not want this park near his home: "What is a puzzle to me is that Messrs. Newman and Blood do not see that the operating of a park of that kind would depreciate values all over the side hill— at least no man who seeks for quiet would think of going out there after that, and I shall not be backward in saying what made me move." Newman and Blood, being incorporators of the Renwick Park and Traffic Association, thus "detracted" from their developments in the heights. Diederichs, who had purchased his land from Newman, sent a copy of the above letter to Newman and asked that there be some protection from "adverse effects" of the park. O. D. Edwards was more direct: "Renwick is just far enough out of the city to make a nice joy ride. Quite out of the way of the old folks at home and the meddling police up in the city. Do you not see the chance for the opening of a new underworld here? Possession means responsibility. If we open a pit here, we must watch it, and watching costs. It is costing us nothing now, and we are care-free of it. Let the swamp land go. Forget it"



Swimming and sliding, c. 1920-30. These and later slides were park fixtures until the 1950s. The shallowness of the upper end of the lake allowed bathers to wade for some distance. The pier was abandoned and rotting by this time, but the Remington complex was still active.

(letter in 25 February 1921 *Journal*).

Despite these and other arguments, the Common Council and Public Works Commission voted to purchase the property on 2 March 1921. The initial \$10,000 was paid that month, with \$20,000 to be paid in the following two years. These groups also voted to extend the city limits to include the park and the upper end of the lake. The deed was transferred from the Renwick Park and Traffic Association to the City of Ithaca on 31 March. Renovations began immediately, under the supervision of Herman Bergholtz. The *Journal* noted on 21 April, "As a consequence of the improvements completed thus far, Renwick Park has not looked so spick, span and picturesque in many years." The beach was cleared of debris, the trolley tracks finally removed (they had been inactive since 1915), and the bandstand refurbished for concerts. The restaurant pavilion was to be reactivated, and the "old motion picture studio" was to be fitted up as an athletic hall. Another former studio building was to become a bathhouse. Bergholtz offered a link to the past and ensured continuity. He had supervised the initial construction and landscaping efforts and was knowledgeable of if not sympathetic to their aims.

The official opening was to have been in May (to commemorate the centennial of Ithaca township), but high water and other problems delayed the event until the Fourth of July. In the interim, Mayor Stewart became seriously ill and died. His obituary stated, "The most conspicuous achievement of his administration in the public interest was the purchase of Renwick Park for the city" (15 June *Journal*). The mayor ensured this achievement at his death by leaving \$150,000 to the city for the improvement and maintenance of the park. The bequest would appear to prove that Stewart's interest in forming the municipal park was humanitarian. His other bequests reinforce this conclusion, including one of \$100,000 to the Ithaca City Hospital. The park was renamed in Stewart's honor as soon as his bequest was known. Plans for a more permanent memorial resulted in the erection of the flagpole to the south of the pavilion group. Dedicated in October 1927, the monument was financed entirely by citizen donations. The inscription on the base reads, "An Exemplar of Civic Duty. . . . His Generous Gifts to the City's Benevolent Institutions and his Endowment of This Recreational Park Bear Lasting Witness to his Unfailing Devotion to the Welfare of This City." The memorial was designed by Arthur Gibb and set in a formal garden recalling the trolley-era entrance garden.

The means and manner of entrance had changed, however. Previously, the trolley had deposited visitors directly behind the pavilion group. Carriages (and early automobiles) used the lakeshore road. The 1921 work involved the introduction of an automobile entrance and drive along the southern edge of the park. This portion of the park was the site of extensive clearing and drainage work; the channel connected to the lagoon dates from this time. The city purchased the strip of land between North Cayuga Street and the railroad from Bergholtz in October 1921 to provide for direct vehicle access to the park from the

city street system. The decision to accommodate automobile traffic affected all subsequent work in the park and effectively changed its nature. One no longer arrived and departed in the pavilion area, but instead circled it and parked closer to the perimeter of the park. The old lakeshore road was truncated but remained as a lakefront parking area. Parking then did not interfere with the architectural elements of the park but changed the visitor's relation to them. The pavilion group was no longer the primary focus and terminus. Visitor activity began to focus on the areas adjoining the roadways through the park.

This pattern became even more pronounced after the City of Ithaca purchased the Cascadilla School property and added it to the park. The purchase was accomplished in 1923 with funds from the Stewart bequest and consistent with his desire to expand and improve the park. The traditional focus of the park on the pavilion area shifted, as new activity focused on Fall Creek, the Cascadilla boathouse, and the large athletic field. The park road was extended to form a loop around the old track. The park shoreline was greatly expanded on the lake and Fall Creek, offering further bathing, fishing, and boating opportunities. The new property was integrated into the park structure with a minimum of change.

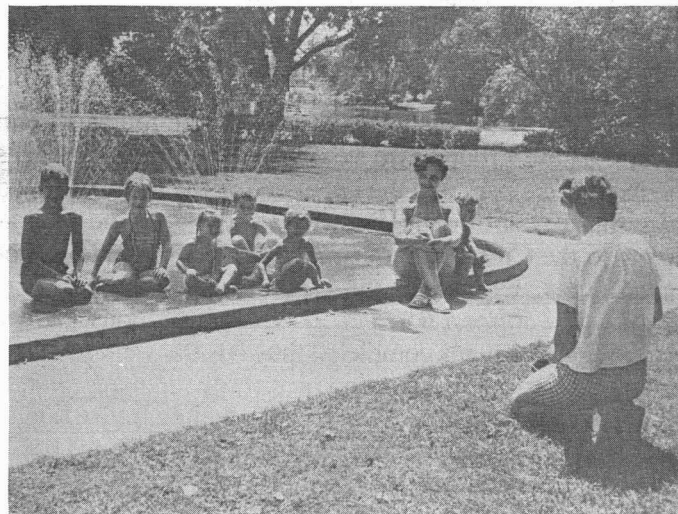
The first planning study for the City of Ithaca appeared in 1924, soon after the initial renovations to Stewart Park were completed. A provisional city planning committee was formed in 1923 and hired Russell VanNest Black to perform a planning study. In his study, Black noted that Stewart Park housed various activities in areas that were "more or less undeveloped." He proposed an extensive circulation system for the whole lakefront area and the establishment of a "tourist park" (i.e., campground) in or near Stewart Park. He concluded: "Stewart Park has splendid possibilities as a great city playground and recreation place, and should be developed according to a very carefully proposed and well thought out plan. As a matter of both fitness and economy of maintenance the greater part of this area should be developed naturalistically with groves, drives, pathways, and open meadows." Black suggested that the bird sanctuary be "left entirely undisturbed except for possible paths." Thus the park served as an impetus and subject of the first planning efforts in Ithaca. It was zoned as parkland soon after the city planning commission was established in 1926.

A "well thought out plan" did not emerge until 1934. In the interim, dredging and infill operations were undertaken to raise the level of the park and stabilize its shorelines. Previously, much of the Cascadilla School property flooded in the spring months, and silt from Fall Creek formed a shifting, marshy headland beyond the boathouse. The level of much of the park was raised between two and three feet over the period of a few years. The buildings and landscapes were not dramatically changed by this work, and the road pattern was duplicated when the final level was reached. The headland was stabilized and enclosed to house a bird "refuge." A stone observation platform was constructed and the whole area was dedicated to Louis

Agassiz Fuertes, who had died in 1927. This improvement was shown on the 1934 plan prepared by the Ithaca firm of Hewitt and Metzger under the direction of Harry W. Eustance, the city engineer. Other elements of the plan were not realized. The athletic field was to be covered with two sets of tennis courts and a central clubhouse/pavilion. The lakeshore above the athletic field was to be extended and wooded, providing a shelter for the tennis complex. A large pier was to extend from the main pavilion group, enclosing a small bathing area accessible by ramp. The thoroughfares suggested by Black a decade earlier were drawn out to connect Stewart Park to the municipal golf course and the "Municipal Air Park" beyond the Inlet. Of the proposals for Stewart Park, only the eastern range of tennis courts and the bathing ramp were realized.

The other major elements of the plan were realized but never connected by the thoroughfares proposed. The golf course was a 1933-35 Work Relief project. The land between Fall Creek and the Inlet had been purchased by Jared T. Newman for the city in 1906 for \$3,540. Largely swamp and scrub willow, the land served as an ash dump. The 1934 work involved grading and infilling of the land; drainage systems were installed and the golf course laid out and seeded. The northern end of this tract was transferred to Cornell, in exchange for the undeveloped biological station site on Lake Road (where Boynton Junior High School now stands). Pedestrian suspension bridges were built across Fall Creek to link these elements to Stewart Park and the bird sanctuary. The municipal airport developed on the west side of the Inlet but was not connected directly to the golf course or other areas to the east. This site developed separately in the years that followed and now houses Cass Park and the Allen H. Tremen State Marine Park. The present-day Stewart Park complex—the bird sanctuary, municipal golf course, Cornell biological field station, and the park proper—was thus conceived of and largely realized in the mid-1930s.

This complex has changed little in the fifty years to the present. The Cornell biological field station and Fuertes bird sanctuary have remained undeveloped wooded swampland. The alignment of the golf course has been altered slightly over the years, but its area has not expanded despite pressure caused by increased usage. Changes in Stewart Park proper have not changed its essentially turn-of-the-century plan and feeling. The pier and bandstand deteriorated and were removed sometime before 1950. More dramatically, the water tower was blown down by the winds of Hurricane Hazel in 1955. These losses adversely affected the architectural ensemble, but neither the tower nor bandstand was replaced. The Cascadilla boathouse suffered from neglect and was substantially reduced and altered. Most of the studio outbuildings were removed, and a permanent concession stand was built behind the dancing pavilion/studio. The latter structure evolved into a restroom and storage facility but retains many of its studio-era features. Park landscape and circulation have also evolved. Playground and picnic areas developed west of the pavilion group, where the Vivian and Gibb teahouse was relocated and used as



Enjoying the spray pool, c. 1960. The lagoon can be seen in the distance.

a picnic pavilion. A spray pool and tubular steel play equipment were installed in the 1950s. In 1951, a merry-go-round was placed adjacent to this area, some forty years after the original example had disappeared. Despite continued studies and dredging efforts, swimming was discontinued in 1961 because of pollution in the lake and the turgidity of its water. Efforts have been made to stabilize erosion along the park shoreline and to improve recreational use of Fall Creek and the lagoon. The present automobile entrance to the park was created as a result of the construction of Route 13 in the mid-1960s, but the park roadways themselves remained unchanged. The most notable change in the landscape was the introduction of willow rows along the lakeshore; these were planted on fill from Route 13 construction. The menagerie was disbanded only recently, but the Fuertes bird pond remains (albeit fenced off) with the addition of two white swans given in memory of Cornelius Edsall, the park caretaker from 1952 to 1972.

Continuity has characterized the development of Stewart Park, so that one can see elements of the original Renwick Park close to a century later. The architectural elements deserve and need to be preserved, both as stylistic examples and functioning park structures. Similarly, the landscape of the park reflects its trolley-park heritage, while accommodating automobile traffic. At present, the architecture and landscape form a coherent but ill-maintained whole. Any planning process should attempt to preserve and enhance the existing elements with their historical development firmly in mind. Historic Ithaca has nominated all of Stewart Park for local landmark status. Currently, the organization is researching the operation of designated parks in other cities.

John Bacon is Architectural Conservator at Historic Ithaca. This is the second of two articles.