

On Saturday, November 4, 1911, one hundred years ago next month, our community gathered in the halls of the Courthouse for what might have been just another ordinary lecture on the virtues of city improvement. In the preceding months residents had seen the presenter scurrying about the city's riverbanks, pacing through parks, and measuring roads ways, but few in attendance expected to witness the awakening of modern Fort Wayne. By means of a cutting edge lantern slide show punctuated by his thick German accent, the visionary "landscape wizard" provided a stirring preview for a plan that would forever change the way our community was built and beautified. The man was George F. Kessler and his Plan for the Parks and Boulevards System of Fort Wayne published the following spring, remains one of the most important documents in our community's advancement from the frontier town of Fort Wayne's past to the city we have today.

Fort Wayne parks history is a powerful and personal history. How many of us have "our park," that special combination of nature, emotion, and memory? For generations we have witnessed the swinging of many proverbial pendulums in the art of bringing nature into the city, but our parks have remained the most unanimously positive and vibrant feature of our community's physical and cultural landscape.

Throughout their history Fort Wayne's parks have mirrored national trends. In the beginning Fort Wayne was 'all park'...the ornery St. Joseph and the dancing St. Mary's greeting one another to form the gracious Maumee amongst lush woodlands and fertile farmlands. Before city parks, cemeteries provided large open green spaces for strolling, picnicking, relaxation and reflection. Fort Wayne's first official parks were haphazardly located and created for their historical or utilitarian values. The first park, Old Fort Park, was formed in 1863 and the first parks plan in 1886 was little more than a map without rationale for future development.

As an outgrowth of the American Renaissance, late 19th century landscape designers began morphing European customs into physical manifestations of the American democratic model, one where parks were designed for the people. More importantly, parks planners became the vanguard of city planning. The titan of this age was Frederick Law Olmsted, best known for his designs of New York's Central Park and the 1893 World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago. As a designer, Olmsted blended traditional English pastoral scenes with formal French urban planning, but he was also a champion of the masses and among the first in the country to encourage civic betterment through his landscape creations. In addition to serving social needs through park aesthetics, he created the American system of linking city parks through boulevards as early as the 1870s.

George Kessler furthered Olmsted's principles and was the first American landscape architect to develop a hierarchal balance in such systems, with large parks, small parks, and boulevards all inextricably bound to serve diverse purposes within a unified arrangement. This was a hallmark of Kessler's brand of German landscape theory, drawing in equal parts on English and French models. Kessler used natural features, especially rivers and streams, to unify park systems, with interspersed retreats as healthy places of recreation and devices for guiding the planned development of cities. Somewhat controversially, Kessler's radical schemes of beauty and utility were unique in American municipal growth, using his creations as apparatuses for city planning nearly a generation before the profession was defined. In all his 230 creations he allowed the natural setting to dictate design and use, and with Fort Wayne's extremely flat topography and prolific waterways Kessler found a rare occasion to demonstrate his genius. Of his 26 comprehensive plans for citywide park and boulevard systems, it is believed that Fort Wayne was one of his most enjoyable projects and possibly his favorite small city design.

For all but a fraction of its existence, Fort Wayne grew in relative harmony with its environment. However, the hurried industrialization and tripling population after the Civil War changed the city into the region's most important manufacturing and transportation capital. This explosion created over 150 factories and thousands of coal burning homes choking the air with pollution and straggling its rivers with waste. With Fort Wayne at its industrial nadir, the Progressive Era sounded a new dawn throughout the United States. Progressives saw social ills as regrettable consequences of industrialization and took up the rally to change the environment in order to change the way people behaved. Under the banner of the City Beautiful Movement, its effects permeated nearly every aspect of American life and fundamentally reshaped Fort Wayne. At its root City Beautiful was much more than a physical or environmental movement, rather City Beautiful in material ways operated to produce City Beautiful in spiritual ways. At the forefront of City Beautiful was Charles Mulford Robinson who wrote the first guide to city planning in 1901, which heralded an age where cities no longer simply expanded, but rather were built.

Fort Wayne's first venture into City Beautiful came with the establishment of its Board of Public Works in 1894. However the primary aesthetic driver, the parks division, was among the lowest priorities with a budget of only \$10,000 for all capital and operating expenses. It was not until the 1905 formation of the Fort Wayne Board of Park Commissioners as a distinct city department, that City Beautiful truly took hold in our community.

In the spring of 1909 the Civic Betterment Committee, a division of the Fort Wayne Commercial Club, brought University of Chicago Professor Dr. Charles Zueblin to Fort Wayne to deliver a weeklong series of lectures on community improvement. Zueblin's impassioned rhetoric sparked the flame of civic awakening that would burn throughout our community for the

next two decades. The lecturers created a wellspring of activity, as the Civic Improvement Association quickly hired Charles Robinson, whose 1909 plan for Fort Wayne's beautification led to the creation of the River Front Commission, which then brought George Kessler to Fort Wayne.

When Robinson arrived it was evident that "the building of this city did not start with the planting of a rose bush." He saw little evidence of civic imagination and lack of planned growth had greatly congested downtown. His report was distributed in over 3,000 copies and provided recommendations on every aspect of City Beautiful. Robinson's most striking proposal was to develop the city's Official Quarter, a broad, beautiful Mall of grass ribbon running four blocks from the courthouse east to the Maumee River, even suggesting that a well meaning arsonist might clear the way of troublesome buildings. Robinson reserved the bulk of his recommendations for the city's parks. He was stunned to find that the random arrangement of its few existing parks were providentially situated and could easily be unified so that the city itself would become one large park. He was also the first to encourage the city to purchase all of the riverbanks within and beyond its limits, and to develop these otherwise useless lands into parks and parkways.

Robinson also established the mechanism for encouraging city growth and increasing property values through the discerning establishment of parklands, then receiving greater revenues from increased property taxes, which would cyclically fuel future park growth *ad infinitum*. Through this technique community leaders realized that its parks and boulevards offered the most effective method to instill City Beautiful throughout the community. From the Robinson Report until the late 1920s, the park department served as the *de facto* city planning department and had the political autonomy to implement a staggering volume of beautification

projects. Levying a 15% tax on properties within park districts, the department was able to sustain a sevenfold increase in its budget and a tenfold increase in park visitation during its first decade.

The mastermind behind these groundbreaking activities was one of Fort Wayne's finest citizens ever to be immortalized in bronze, Colonel David Foster. Throughout the six decades he lived in his adopted home of Fort Wayne, Foster was intimately involved with nearly every activity designed for the good of the people, but he is best remembered as the father of the city park system. Foster's ambitious scheme was to locate a park within a 10 minute walk of every person in the community and to provide one acre of parkland for every one hundred citizens. Embodying the park's vision, Foster believed his labor merely signaled the budding of long term efforts, and that it was the responsibility of future generations to realize the dream of an expansive, serviceable, and visually and spiritually beautiful series of interconnected green spaces. David Foster was also George Kessler's greatest champion, and as he and his protégé Fred Shoaff embraced the Kessler Plan so too was the plan embraced by the community.

Building on Robinson, Kessler created the first major comprehensive plan for the development of the urban environment in Fort Wayne. The Kessler Plan is splendid in its simplicity, to connect all areas of the city through a broad nineteen mile circuit of thirteen dominant boulevards that intersect with ribbons of parkways along the three rivers, lining all with both small and large parks. His system was designed to be enjoyed at a slow pace on a human scale, and he created scenes to experience via foot and hoof, not wheel and rail.

Kessler also designed the system to function as an organism, with every piece bound to the whole and ultimately linked to the three rivers. He believed that not only were these waterways Fort Wayne's greatest asset, they were also the embodiment of her individuality and he amplified their place in the community's consciousness by making them the nucleus of his plan. Kessler called for a complete reversal of conditions along the entire stream fronts where "the greater part of the shore line presented the ugliest conditions possible in a city, an extremely slovenly condition of outhouses, trash, and ash heaps." He recommended that the city purchase and beautify all lands along its riverbanks and create nine miles of river walks and drives. His riverside avenues followed the general course of the streams in long, easy, graceful curves providing a harmonious transition between his straight and formal boulevards.

Kessler's ideal boulevard required 40 feet of finely paved roadway bordered by 30 feet of park strip on either side, with perfectly uniform curbing, sidewalks of at least eight feet, and electrical lights. His boulevards ran along the city's limits as a way to guide residential growth and through their improvement he predicted "a transforming of the ugliest into the best districts of the city [where] the investments in these improvements [will] return many times their cost" through increased property values and tax revenues.

In addition to their beautification values, the parks in Kessler's Plan were also situated to stimulate growth. When he drafted his plan the parks system only had 143 acres, the largest being East Swinney Park at 45 acres. Kessler recommended at least quadrupling park lands through the establishment of four large 100 acre parks at the tip of each city quadrant. He situated these large parks at the corners of his plan to draw outlying populations into the system, whereas smaller parks held the opposite role, to serve existing neighborhoods.

To a surprising extent the Kessler Plan was realized and it had a lasting influence upon the physical development of our community. His was a dynamic proposal, meant to launch a generation of planning and improvement with the understanding that it would soon be found necessary to acquire and beautify lands along the outer rim of the extended greater city. This very process has taken place for generations and a number of people involved in city planning have expressed and utilized Kessler even if they did not realize it.

The first Kessler design in Fort Wayne was actually completed several months before the publication of his plan, with the creation of the Thieme Drive Overlook along the St. Mary's. Theodore Thieme was so enraptured with the ideals of the City Beautiful Movement that he privately funded the project as an inspirational preview for the Kessler Plan. The Thieme Drive Overlook could be considered the embodiment of Kessler's desire to beautify chief points of interest along his road systems by amplifying the inherent beauty of these natural sites.

Kessler only designed two other parks in Fort Wayne: Foster Park and Three Rivers Park. With the 1912 donation of 107 acres along the St. Mary's, David and his brother Samuel Foster nearly doubled the total holdings of the park department and provided the southwestern anchor to the Kessler Plan. Robert Hanna declared Foster's gift "the biggest, the best and grandest thing that has happened in Fort Wayne in many years, if not in the entire history of the city." As the only true Kessler park in Fort Wayne, his designs for active and passive recreation are splendidly blended with natural and manmade features, and Foster Park remains one of the most noteworthy examples of beauty throughout the cultural landscape of our city. Immediately after Foster Park, several other park lands were acquired at strategic intervals along the rivers, including Vesey along Spy Run Creek, Bloomingdale, Camp Allen, and Roosevelt along the St. Mary's and an expanded Lakeside. Lakeside Park was particularly important as it marked the birth of our

Rivergreenway system when its levies along the Maumee were developed to encourage pedestrian use.

For his Three Rivers Park at the confluence, Kessler ambitiously called for the damming of the Maumee near the Columbia Street bridge to create a large lake, which would serve as a glorious hub for the linear parks along the rivers. Although his plans for Three Rivers Park were never realized, Kessler laid the basis for the rediscovery and reapplication of his genius many decades later. His concept for Three Rivers Park, arguably the most important element of his plan, would languish for nearly 80 years before its realization in Headwaters Park and the Rivergreenway.

The trees along Kessler's boulevards were the adhesive that bound his system back to the rivers and into a beautiful whole. He specified lawns planted with avenue trees on formal lines, uniformly and properly spaced to create a wide series of green rivers throughout the entire boulevard system. Kessler chose the European sycamore, also known as the London or Oriental Plane Tree, as his signature tree in Fort Wayne. A hardier, urban variety of the American sycamore found along the country's riverbanks, Kessler used the European sycamore to establish a "river rhythm" along his boulevards. His double rows of sycamore served to replicate the closed feeling of riverbanks, mimicking the river experience along his roadways. The park strips on either side of his boulevards were also to be lined with rows of trees on either edge, creating a thick canopy that spanned each right of way.

Many of the city's wide, tree-lined streets originated with the Kessler Plan and Rudisill Boulevard is its finest example. Reflecting on the lasting value of Kessler today, one resident observed that "few streets in Fort Wayne can rival the beauty of Rudisill in any sense...it is a scene, not a street, a painting framed by the road and the canopy." Beginning in 1913,

sycamores were planted in double rows on either side of the 100 foot right of way along Rudisill, about thirty of which stand today. Having been little more than a dirt path and despite Mayor Hosey's depiction of it as "a good gravel street and at fifty feet is wide enough for all demands," the enlarged Rudisill Boulevard was finished with impressive macadam pavement in 1916. With the fresh enhancements, Foster accurately predicted that the new boulevard would quickly become very gilt-edged and some properties quadrupled in value immediately after the improvements.

More than just a blueprint, the Kessler Plan gave local developers the theoretical structure for expanding the city. Kessler radically changed the way developers interacted with the community and his plan's implementation is visible in virtually all historic districts and neighborhoods created between 1912 and World War II.

A glowing comparison of pre- and post-Kessler residential development is seen in the works of Louis Curdes. Curdes's 1906 Forest Park and 1910 Forest Park Place additions were slow to develop despite their breathtakingly progressive boulevards, setbacks, and design standards. The neighborhoods only gained popularity after the unveiling of the Kessler Plan, when Curdes branded them as "the first realization of the dream of beautifying Fort Wayne" and advertised Kessler's prescribed trees, paved boulevards, and concrete sidewalks. Curdes followed this success with his Weisser Park and Driving Park additions, the first Fort Wayne subdivisions planned specifically with the automobile in mind. He also connected his neighborhoods to the park system by personally securing the donation of Klug Park in 1916.

If Curdes was the first to incorporate the Kessler Plan into existing neighborhoods, then Arthur Shurcliff embodied its use in new developments and provides the link between the plan's first and second phases. Although Kessler offered the park department free services after 1913

until his death in 1923 Shurcliff seems to have replaced him as the city's primary landscape planner after 1917, when Kessler exhaustively contributed to the home front effort during World War I. Shurcliff's greatest divergence from the Kessler Plan was their contrasting philosophies on the role of the automobile. Kessler viewed automobile travel as a form of leisure, not a real mode of transportation. Shurcliff recognized the growing value Fort Wayne citizens placed on larger and faster vehicular movement and his neighborhoods prospered because he correctly predicted the future dominance of personal automobile travel. Although Robinson was the first to coordinate expansion around the twelve acre grove of Rockhill Park, then far to the west, he and Kessler both struggled to define and develop the western edges of the city. Shurcliff solved the riddle of Fort Wayne's west side and directed its western expansion by drafting plans for a linear park between Swinney Park and Lindenwood Cemetery and developing Jefferson Boulevard, which connected downtown with the Fort Wayne Country Club.

Shurcliff was the favored landscape architect of Lee and Joel Ninde's Wildwood Builders, a nationally recognized local firm that ushered a new era of suburban development. Shurcliff designed the Wildwood Builder's three preeminent suburban developments, Lafayette Place in 1915, Wildwood Park in 1916, and Brookview in 1917. Through Brookview, Shurcliff and the Nindes's extended the previously platted Oak Knoll Place and Irvington Park neighborhoods, encouraging growth north of State.

Shurcliff also buttressed the northwestern corner of the Kessler Plan by designing Franke Park after its 1921 acquisition and possibly providing designs for John Bass's 65 acre Brookside estate. The relocation of Saint Francis College to Brookside years later crystallized the park like feel in the northwest. The park department reinforced the northern neighborhoods by creating parkways along Griswold Drive, Eastbrook, Westbrook, and St. Joe Boulevard, and also

boulevarding Sherman, Anthony, and State. These publically funded improvements provided crucial connections between State Boulevard and the privately developing northeast and northwest corners of the Kessler Plan.

A number of other historical neighborhoods grew in the years after Kessler within the framework of the city grid through the development of planned rectilinear suburbs. Kensington Park and South Kensington Park bordered Curdes's neighborhoods along North Anthony, further beautifying its intersection with State. Around Rudisill and South Anthony other rectilinear neighborhoods sprouted with Illsley Place, Oakdale, Woodhurst, and Pontiac Place, as well as the first curvilinear developments of Anthony Wayne Village and Southwood Park, and wonderful examples of radial form with Lafayette Place and Harrison Hill.

Into this flurry of beautification stepped the final ingredient, one that would define the park department for a generation. In 1917 David Foster convinced Adolph Jaenicke to fill the position of Superintendent of Parks, which he would hold for over three decades. As Kessler provided the bones, Shurcliff provided the muscle and tendons, Jaenicke provided the skin, and Foster provided the spirit that would indelibly transform our parks into the system we have today. Jaenicke's masterful Japanese Gardens, resplendent Rose Gardens and beloved Sunken Gardens all served as jewels throughout the park system. Memorial Park, designed as a pleasure driving park, the eastern entrance of the Lincoln Highway, a memorial to the city's World War I casualties, and a showpiece for Jaenicke's reproduction of the Blue Grotto of Capri, was one of the finest amalgamations of our community's enthusiasm during the City Beautiful Movement.

By the 1920s Fort Wayne experienced its first concerted governmental efforts to control land use, which led to the first zoning ordinances. These regulations morphed City Beautiful into City Practical or City Functional. Five years after the 1921 City Planning Act, Fort Wayne

became the last Indiana city to establish a municipal planning department. Until the creation of the City Plan Commission in 1926, the Kessler Plan had been the only complete instrument to guide Fort Wayne's development. Under the Commission's first president Lee Ninde, their first major activity was to enlarge the Kessler Plan to include newly annexed areas and to prepare for the increasing role of automobiles in the life and commerce of the city.

The following year, the Plan Commission hired the Chicago firm of Bennett, Parsons, and Frost to create a new street plan, one that built upon Kessler, but also recognized the growing importance of the automobile. Their 1927 plan provides the evolutionary link between the Kessler Plan and the transportation dominated engineering of the rest of the 20th century. To protect Fort Wayne's streets from becoming congested thoroughfares, Robert Hanna proposed a "circumurban boulevard," which would encircle the city as the next generation of Kessler's peripheral boulevards. Extending Kessler's boulevard box, the first Circumurban Way initiated a progression of outer belt expansion that would lead to Coliseum Boulevard in 1952, and later Interstates 69 and 469.

Bennett, Parsons, and Frost also called for an expansion of park lands by recommending the purchase of more riverbanks than any of the previous reports. By 1929 the city owned over half of its river frontage, but these tracts were tiny, incongruent slivers and practically useless for park purposes. That same year, Hanna sounded the call to give the rivers back to the people in his first of three reports that described the formation of a rivergreenway system that would not only run throughout Fort Wayne, but extend from Toledo to Evansville. In true Kessler fashion, the heart of Hanna's grand designs was a majestic park at the confluence around the site of the Three Rivers Water Filtration Plant.

Fort Wayne's last true Kessler inspired landscape architect, Lawrence Sheridan, arrived on the eve of the Great Depression, which would cripple the ambitious campaigns of the young planning department. As an understudy of Kessler in Indianapolis, Sheridan was tapped to fulfill Kessler's visions for both that city and Fort Wayne after his mentor's death. Indian Village, designed by Sheridan in 1927, is the clearest illustration of the Kessler Plan through several distinct periods of development. Connected to system by the Sheridan designed Gateway Triangle entrance, Indian Village would boast beautiful curvilinear streets, open views, and generous setbacks. To serve the new neighborhood Sheridan repeated the calls of Robinson and Kessler for the development of a large park to the south of the St. Mary's bridge between the river and Bluffton Road. This was first developed as Sears Park in 1926 and later Foster West in 1982. But the Depression stifled the fledgling development and only 20 homes, less than 10% of the original total, were completed by 1938.

The 1934 passing of David Foster could have sounded the death knell for the Kessler Plan, but the continuity of strong leadership was felt as his successor Fred Shoaff served as Park Board president from 1935 to 1961. Because of these two presidents, the Fort Wayne park system weathered critical threats in the 1930s and 40s while others throughout the country were decimated. Their adherence to Kessler's vision was undeniably the most important factor for ingraining and maintaining the plan for half a century.

Shoaff's presidency saw the implementation of nearly all the missing components of the Kessler Plan, especially in the eastern half of the city. Along with International Harvester, itself the finest industrial outgrowth of the Kessler Plan, the establishment of McMillen Park in 1937 would improve the area in the true spirit of City Beautiful, providing breathing space for the families of thousands of factory workers. Shoaff was exceptionally foresighted and actually

leapfrogged a generation of development with the establishment of his namesake park far to the northeast in 1955. At the end of his career, Arthur Shurcliff returned to Fort Wayne to design Shoaff Park marking the final City Beautiful event for the park system. The location of Shoaff Park encouraged the later development of the final park pieces of the Kessler Plan, Johnny Appleseed Park, Northside Park, and the first planned greenway, the Little Turtle Trail.

Following World War II the community witnessed the first noticeable divergences from the Kessler Plan, leading to its eventual dormancy as most of Fort Wayne was built as a reaction rather than a continuation of Kessler. The Baby Boom's need for widespread affordable housing created many subdivisions along and across the city's borders, which were fed by a growing reliance on private automobiles. With greater wealth citizens could now afford to isolate themselves and neighborhoods turned into insulated enclaves, unconnected to the park and boulevard system. The only direct piece of the Kessler Plan developed as a byproduct of our community's growing addiction to the automobile was the elevation of the Nickel Plate Railroad in 1955, which encouraged development north of downtown over 40 years after Kessler's prediction.

If the park department's character shifted from "City Beautiful" to "City Functional" in its first decade and then to "City Transportational" in the 1950s, after Shoaff's death it changed again into "City Recreational." As the public desired more directed and coordinated activities, the department's budget for programming and marketing increased dramatically, and aesthetics, acquisitions, and improvements fell by the wayside. From the first year-round recreation center created during World War II, within a generation the park department supported 60 supervised, active recreation centers. Shoaff's immediate successor, Park Board President Byron Novitsky, speaking to Quest in 1970 noted "park activities, like mini skirts, have reached heights never

dreamed of by the original founders of the park department.” In order to service a greater distribution of the population with active recreation opportunities, the department began acquiring vest pocket parks, small downtown properties without any connection to the master system.

By the 1970s parks supporters realized that too much emphasis was placed on activities and lack of planning and coordination was stunting park growth. Nearly fifty years after Robert Hanna had called for the creation of a private foundation to supplement governmental support, the Fort Wayne Park Foundation was formed in 1974. This would reinvent the arrangement between private supporters and the park department into the relationship we have today where, in the most general sense, private donors pay for acquisitions and major improvements while the city pays for programming and maintenance.

The national bicentennial celebration and rise of environmentalism refocused many communities, including Fort Wayne, on their core natural and historical resources. By this time only a few parks had any real connection to our rivers and those that were connected to the system could not easily be reached on foot. The Kessler Plan resurfaced as these needs fostered a desire to reconnect the parks to the rivers and bind the system on a human scale. While working for the city in the 1970s Mark Rozeen rediscovered Kessler during the early conversations for developing greenways and trails, and ingratiated the dusty plan into future proposals. With the completion of the Rivergreenway Plan in 1975, a distinct reincarnation of Kessler, the community had its first new scheme for riverfront acquisition and development in over 60 years. The formation of the Rivergreenway Consortium under the leadership of Ernie Williams soon followed and channelled the community’s desire to celebrate its rivers with the most concerted momentum seen in generations.

The Flood of 1982 provided the final justification for realizing one of the most important pieces of the Kessler Plan, the large park at the confluence. It was consistent with architect Eric Kuhne's design philosophy to draw on historical sources for inspiration and he indeed referenced Kessler during his creation of Headwaters Park. Not only its location, but also its breathtaking river motifs are quintessential throwbacks to Kessler's designs. Remarkably, Kuhne, "the greatest testimony to any civilization lies in its ability to restore the landscape and culture it displaced...Headwaters does just this, like no other single act in Fort Wayne's history."

Sadly, the Kessler Plan was again forgotten after its initial influence on Headwaters and the Rivergreenways, as transportation planning again trumped vision and aesthetics. Yet this very struggle birthed the most recent rediscovery of the Kessler Plan and elevated it to a level of celebration unseen for many decades.

In the late 1990s historical landscapes began to be evaluated not only on their structural or architectural merits, but on the relationships between manmade and natural features. Ironically, the cultural landscape movement of the past decade reiterates the very association Kessler was trying to create, with both physical and emotional harmony between man and his environment. With the formation of the Friends of the Parks of Allen County in 2000 the pieces were in place for a rediscovery of our rich cultural landscape and a full revival of the Kessler Plan.

After a 2002 tour of the city by Charles Birnbaum, the Director of the National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative, the Kessler Plan was fully resuscitated. Birnbaum was shocked by the remarkably intact components of the Kessler Plan and amazed that it had not only survived, but actually expanded and thrived as a viable system. The Kessler Plan secured a place in the national consciousness when its 2005 multiple property listing for the National Register of

Historic Places was enthusiastically received and grew into a full proposal that was awarded earlier this year. Our centennial park and boulevard system is now nationally recognized because not one, but four nationally significant landscape architects and city planners (Robinson, Kessler, Shurcliff, and Sheridan) were involved in its development. One of only two park systems to receive such a designation in Indiana, the other being Kessler's plan for Indianapolis, and among a handful throughout the nation, this designation provides the national recognition for Kessler's Plan for Fort Wayne that was long overdue. Including over 1,800 acres and thousands of sites it transcends obvious boundaries and in the true spirit of the cultural landscape movement represents a citywide context for beauty.

Whether overtly guided by Kessler or guided by the spirit of his plan, the past few years have witnessed a number of park, trail, and roadway developments that are realizations of his plan or logical extensions its recommendations. Several large parks have been added to the system that are consistent with the Kessler Plan, including Salomon Farm in the north, Kreager Park in the east, and the recently acquired former Dimension Ford property west of Swinney. Even tiny Tillman Park, the oft forgotten southern anchor of the system, will play a major role in the coming decades, as new trails link the Maumee to the St. Mary's in an enormous arc around the riverless southeast sector. Kessler would be moved by this generation's love of trails. The newly formed Fort Wayne Trails is a perfect representation of the Kessler ideal and will coordinate decades of efforts to bring the parks within reach of the entire community. The organization oversees the 24 miles along the original Rivergreenway, another 42 miles throughout the county, and within the next two decades plans to add an additional 240 miles.

Our roadways have recently sounded deeper echoes of Kessler. New bicycle paths along Rudisill, Berry, and Wayne have provided safer and more enjoyable routes along Kessler's

original boulevards, more on the scale and pace he intended. Ardmore Avenue has taken on the aesthetic nature of the western border, forming the fourth side of the boulevard square and bounding an area that Kessler and his predecessors never truly resolved. Plans are also under consideration to give boulevard treatments to Broadway, Bluffton, Clinton, Tennessee and even parts of Coliseum. Only in its infancy, one of the finest revisitations of Kessler is the railroad grade separation along Anthony between Maumee and Pontiac. Consideration of the Kessler Plan is mandatory for all requests for proposal for this project, the first time in any living person's life that Kessler is required to be an active component of a street plan.

Since the days of Kessler the system expanded well beyond its original design, as he intended. Using this same growth ratio, it is possible that within this century they could fill the unincorporated limits of Allen County and extend beyond its borders. To coordinate this growth we should regard Robert Hanna's caution to "think in terms of centuries rather than in terms of years" and Kessler would say: 'you forgot me once, please don't forget me again.'

A central part of this paper's celebration of Kessler is to recognize the extreme foresight city leaders had a century ago; celebrating the Kessler Plan is also a celebration of our forbearers' vision. David Foster's assertion that "there is certainly no expenditure made by our city government so popular as that made for the maintenance and improvement of our parks" is as true today as when it was spoken in 1915. Today the Fort Wayne Parks Department boasts 86 parks, over 2,400 acres of park land, and 58,000 trees along the city's streets. A century later the system has achieved Kessler and Foster's goals of one acre of parkland per one hundred residents and green space for all within a 10 minute reach.

If the Fort Wayne Park and Boulevard System had an official scripture, it would be Proverbs 29:8, which is astonishingly found throughout the historiography of parks history:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” The Kessler Plan for Fort Wayne has not perished because of its purity of vision, strengthening the relationships between its people, rivers, and parks. Many of the general tenets of the Kessler Plan remain equally important one hundred years later and it is our duty to ensure that in the next hundred years this foundation does not deteriorate.

In the spirit of City Beautiful, I would like to close with an excerpt from Hanna’s “The Epoch Maker,” a query we should frequently revisit: “What has this generation done to mark an epoch in the life of Fort Wayne? What great civic achievement will the future historian of Fort Wayne record to the credit of this generation?”

In 1912 George Kessler created a vision for our community that has endured for a century...can we do better?

Please note that this is the presentation version of the paper delivered to Quest Club on 10/21/11 and does not contain endnotes, citations or (unless noted) direct quotations, which will be added to the final draft. If you would also like a copy of the final draft (with these additions) it will be available at a later date and I would be happy to share it as well.

TMP