

Case study: Kelly/Shorts Stadium and the surrounding area

Matt, HST 302, Fall 2012

During Saturday's in the fall Central Michigan University students, fans and alumni try to fill the 32,885 seats at Kelly/Shorts Stadium. The crowd roars a chant "Fire up Chips," and the team wears a "C" on its helmet for its nickname, the Chippewas – named after the Indian tribe that has roamed the same area for centuries. The parking lots that surround the stadium were once farmland, and before that dense forests. There are no more traces of the wolves, wolverines, beavers, wildcats, deer and muskrat's used to explore a dense forest. The only animals in sight are a few birds looking to find some concessions left behind by fans.

This land that now hosts the CMU football stadium and its surroundings has been through an unbelievable amount of intense and rapid change that has made it three completely different environments in the past 200 years.

In the mid-1800's there were still not very many inhabitants in Michigan. According to C.H. Brigham in 1868 Michigan only had 10 towns in the entire state with more than 1,000 people at 1838. He said Michigan was filled by "dense forests," except in the southernmost part of the state. These dense forests that filled the land were filled with animals we don't see anymore. ¹

Wolves and Wolverines are two animals that The Lumber Region of Michigan said were overpopulated before settlers began taking over the land.² In the Past and Present of Isabella County, Michigan published in 1911, written by Isaac A. Fancher it said there were beavers, deer, wildcats, hedgehogs, mink, marten and muskrats lived in the county. Outside of deer, all of those

¹ Brigham, C.H., The Lumber Region of Michigan (Syracuse: Gaylor Bros inc., 1868), 77.

² Brigham, Lumber Region, 81

animals are non-longer existent in this area.³ The Lumber Region of Michigan said how fur trade became important and vital for Michigan people in the mid 1800's to prosper from. This resulted in a major loss of wolves and wolverines in the area.

The first drastic change the environment to the land came full circle in the late 1800's. Deforestation changed the entire environment when settler came to Isabella county in full force according to Fancher. He wrote that they were the reason lands had become barren wastes from the destruction of the fertile soil and abandonment by the animals. That happened because settlers came there and immediately chopped down and cleared out the land to be able to farm crops in the area.⁴

This doesn't mean that people weren't aware of the problem even in its early stages. An 1887 document from the Michigan State Forest Commission stated how counties needed to stop the continued spread of deforestation and start to preserve forests just as they would have a fire station or city hall. This document also brought to life the problem the area was having with forest fires. Apparently an easier way to clear land for agriculture to set it ablaze. The government was pleading with counties in this document to preserve and plant forests to better the land and counties.⁵

³ Fancher, Isaac A., Past and Present of Isabella County (Indianapolis, Indiana: B.F. Bowen and Company, 1911) p 40.

⁴ Brigham, Lumber Region, p 83

⁴ Fancher, Past Isabella, p 268

⁵ W.J. Beal, Chas W. Garfield, First Report of the State Forest Commission. (Lansing: Thorp and Godfrey State printers and binders, 1887) p 15.

Fancher said land in Isabella the 1860's was "dense wilderness of timber where nature had been at work for hundreds and thousands of years forming and shaping the county." But then things all changed when settlers came and as Fancher said they were able to chop down an acre of land and clear it in eight to 10 days. The settlers didn't even use the trees they chopped down, there was no market for most the trees in Isabella so they just burnt them.⁶ This massive change ended the environment and ecosystem that had been going on for centuries in Michigan. Instead of the flourishing forests with rich plants and animals it was cleared out and emptied, replaced by fields full of wheat, corn and potatoes fields in the county.

Agriculture land is exactly what the area where the football stadium is today was. Aerial photos from 1952 shows a birds eye view of the fields that covered the land along with a farm and a few houses against the road along Mission and Broomfield Street⁷. According to a land map and a Central Michigan Life article in 1961 the McRae family owned a large portion of the land until they sold it to Central Michigan University.⁸

This is when there was the next major change took place to this land. It switched from the agriculture, as it was with the McRae's and W.W. Crowley land ownership⁹, from around 70-100 years to the football stadium it is now – and took a strange path during its urban change.

⁶ Fancher, Past Isabella, p 266–267

⁷ Aerial photograph 1952, Union Township, Isabella County, Michigan. Found in Isabella County (Mich.) Aerial Photographs, 1950–1969. Clarke Historical Library.

⁸ N.A., Construction progressing on new residential units (Mount Pleasant: CM–Life, 1961) p. 4

⁹ Rockford Map Publishers, Farm plat book with index to owners, Isabella County, Michigan (Rockford, Ill.: Rockford Map Publishers, 1939 and 1960)

As another aerial photo from 1965¹⁰ and CM Life article reiterates the land was used as “dirt dumps” from construction elsewhere on campus.¹¹ Decades later a CM Life article from 2000 exposes that dirt wasn’t the only thing being dumped at the time. “Hazardous wastes, including what one source alleges is Agent Orange, sit buried in CMU’s backyard, on and near the south end of campus,” the story states. It goes on to say “Jennifer Ehlert, safety coordinator for the College of Science and Technology, said the burial site near the football field was used from 1962 to 1967 to deposit radioactive waste from CMU classrooms. At least six burials occurred during this time. The mounds near the train tracks are just excess dirt while the Agent Orange deposits are buried under level ground, the worker said.”¹²

In a journal article called Environmental Health Perspectives it states, after a series of studies and research, that the exposure to the Agent Orange chemical raises the risk of developing soft-tissue sarcomas and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma – which both are beginning signs or carry cancer¹³. They found this out after it was sprayed in Vietnam. According to Judnich’s CM Life stories there were 250-300 gallons of the Agent Orange buried in various locations surrounding where the stadium is now concealed and put in the ground¹⁴. It was Agent Orange

¹⁰ Aerial photograph 1965, Union Township, Isabella County, Michigan. Found in Isabella County (Mich.) Aerial Photographs, 1950–1969. Clarke Historical Library.

¹¹ Chip Lusko, Construction project clarified (Mount Pleasant: CM Life, 1971) 1.

¹² Anthony Judnich, Worker claims dangerous hazardous waste buried at CMU (<http://www.cm-life.com/2000/03/29/workerclaimsdangeroushazardouswasteburiedatcmu/>, 2000) (accessed October 9, 2012).

¹³ Eva Kramarova, et al, Environmental Health Perspectives: Exposure to Agent Orange and Occurrence of Soft-Tissue Sarcomas or Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas (Brogan & Partners, 1998) p 673

¹⁴ Judnich, Hazardous waste

among other radioactive waste from the time used in CMU classrooms like biology and chemistry.

A CM Life story by Greg Dunn in 1989 listed a different radioactive waste that was being investigated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in that area. The NRC found Strontium-90, Phosphorus-32, Iodine-131 and Cobalt-60 in 1980. It was a violation of NRC guidelines, but they checked water samples and everything was alright. A nuclear critic from Midland said the Sr-90 takes 300 years to decay and if it gets ingested through water or vegetables grown in nearby soil it could lead to cancer of the bone marrow. The critic said the waste needed to be removed – the university took no such action.¹⁵

According to another Environmental Health Perspectives issue in 2000, plenty of waste from biology and chemistry research, like the CMU classes in the 1960's, have caused problems. Also in this reading it says the NRC prohibits any “undecayed” wastes and even when it is decayed chemical waste facilities don't take some that are problematic, give places no real legal option to get rid of these wastes.¹⁶

Shortly after the construction and radioactive waste dumping stopped in the mid-to-late 1960's, the university decided to use this basically unused landfill as its place to add on to its athletics fields. The university had planned to build a new stadium for multiple things in the main part of campus near Finch Fieldhouse, but it wasn't big enough so they decided to build it south of Broomfield where bought the land from the McRae farmers.

¹⁵ Gregg Dunn, Waste disposal violated NRC guidelines (Mount Pleasant: CM-Life, 1989) p 1

¹⁶ Edward H. Rau, et al, Environmental Health Perspectives, Vol. 108, Supplement 6: Biochemical Research and the Environment (Brogan & Partners, Dec. 2000), p 973-974

After consideration of building an indoor-domed field, CMU decided to build what is now Kelly/Shorts Stadium (obviously without the new renovations and video scoreboard). The first football game was played on Nov. 4, 1971 where that land's second major change came full circle. Thousands of people used the parking lots or just walked and then filed in and sat on the concrete and metal seats to watch CMU play Illinois State.

Along with the construction of the football stadium and surrounding parking lots CMU wanted it to look nice, and natural. A CM Life article from earlier in 1971 said CMU didn't want the parking lots to be seen from the road so they did a beautification project building a man-made pond, grassy hills and trees¹⁷. I found it extremely ironic that CMU felt the need to make this area look "natural" and beautify it when it used to be a giant forest with all kinds of animals living in it and vegetation. It goes to show you how much change swept through the area in those 100 years. In the 1860's it was a forest being chopped down by new settlers in the county for agriculture. Now it is being urbanized with parking lots and stadiums the university felt it needed a "beautification process," to a piece of land that used to be a beautiful forest simply a man-made pond and a grassy hill and trees is suppose to make it look natural? That's laughable.

In the late 1970's CMU decided to add to the beautification project with the excavation of a lake, a huge mound for another grassy hill and hundreds of trees according to a CM Life article.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lusko, Construction project clarified (Mount Pleasant: CM Life, 1971) 1.

¹⁸ James N. Fisher, Campus undergo 'facelift' (Mount Pleasant: CM-Life, May 24, 1978) p 7.

That mostly brings us to present day. From a rich, dense forest with lots of wildlife, to chopped down and cleared to be farm fields and then to its urbanization and waste dumping. Before this project I would walk over hills to go to football games and think the trees really made it look neat and the pond had a nice backdrop to the football stadium and parking lot. Now it just feels like the fake air and trees that is seen in *The Lorax*. Deforestation swept through this area just as it did, really, throughout the earth when people would settle in a new land. Its mindboggling to think that the entire area around the stadium and really what now is Mount Pleasant was a forest. The only remains you see of a forest in Mount Pleasant is the parks and small forest areas that surround the river that goes through town.

Then, again just as we have studied happening throughout the world, people were negligent dumping and polluting radioactive wastes in the ground after the agriculture scene began changing into the urban land it now is. Like we've talked about this semester it can be look at as a tragedy at the commons. The commons would really be our earth and the soil that we think we can just fill with hazardous waste because not that many people will do it. Now that soil can't be used to farm and the water it comes in contact with it is dangerous to any human or animal.

I love college football and everything about it, I love the game day atmosphere and the battle that takes place between the lines. I even work at the stadium on game days, so that stadium and its land has been very important to me and my career – but working on this project and doing this research saddened me. I used to think the tiny trees and man-made pond was a nice looking landscaping only to realize the true nature on this land was devoured. I learned that if there is a hill I'm walking over around the stadium it was either man made to "beautify" the

land, or below it contains hazardous wastes that could be detrimental to my health if I was exposed to it. I learned that there were a huge group of animals that lived in this space before settlers tore down their habitats that are now extinct (in this area). All of that is depressing.

This area is a prime example and recap of what we've learned and read about all semester. We started when settlers would reach a land and they would first start with deforestation and then clear it for agriculture and personal gains. What we've learned about recently has been human's neglect to its surroundings with pollution and the hazardous waste dumping is a prime example. Then the urbanization of laying concrete and buildings all over what once was a forest and farmland.

I've never been a tree-hugger, but I really think the amount of drastic change in 200 years on this land is wrong. From the forests to animals and even soil has all been destroyed or eroded. I understand with the social and economical growth of our society some of these things would have to be built, but couldn't we have preserved more? Couldn't we have been more careful to keep some of these animals in the area and not dump awful waste in the ground that is dangerous?

Now when I walk to CMU football games I'll no longer be thinking about how cool the ducks are in the man-made ponds are – I'll be thinking about the different animals I'll never get to see in the area. I'll think about the giant trees that once stood there instead of the tiny once planted on the man-made hills. The thought that only a few feet below me are decaying toxic wastes will concern me. But the realization of how destructive we were to this land over the past 200 years will now be evident to me.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Aerial photograph 1952, Union Township, Isabella County, Michigan. Found in Isabella County (Mich.) Aerial Photographs, 1950–1969. Clark Historical Library.

Aerial photograph 1965, Union Township, Isabella County, Michigan. Found in Isabella County (Mich.) Aerial Photographs, 1950–1969. Clark Historical Library.

CM Life. "Construction progressing on new residential units." 10 6, 1961: 4.

Dunn, Gregg. "Waste disposal violated NRC guidelines." CM–Life, 6 21, 1989: 1.

Fisher, James N. "Campus undergo 'facelift'." CM–Life, May 24, 1978: 7.

Judnich, Anthony. Worker claims dangerous hazardous waste buried at CMU. March 29, 2000. <http://www.cm-life.com/2000/03/29/workerclaimsdangeroushazardouswasteburiedatcmu/> (accessed October 9, 2012).

Lusko, Chip. "Construction project clarified." CM Life, 10 11, 1971: 1.

Rockford Map Publishers. Farm plat book with index to owners, Isabella County, Michigan. Rockford, Ill.: Rockford Map Publishers, 1939, 1960.

Secondary Sources:

Brigham, C. H. The Lumber Region of Michigan. Syracuse: Gaylord Bros Inc., 1868: 77-103.

Edward H. Rau, et al. "Environmental Health Perspectives." *Biochemical Research and the Environment*, Brogan & Partners. December 2000: 973-974.

Fancher, Isaac A. The Past and Present of Isabella County Michigan. Indianapolis, Indiana: B.F. Bowen and Company, 1911.

Kramárová, Eva, et al. "Exposure to Agent Orange and Occurrence of Soft-Tissue Sarcomas or Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas: An Ongoing Study in Vietnam." *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 1998: 671-678.

W.J. Beal, Chas W. Garfield. First Report of the State Forest Commission. Forest Commission, Lansing: Thorp and Godfrey State printers and binders, 1887.

Aerial photo 1952, intersection of Mission and Broomfield Street. The southwest part of the intersection now holds Kelly/Shorts Stadium.



Aerial photo 1965, intersection of Mission and Broomfield Street. The southwest part of the intersection now holds Kelly/Shorts Stadium.

