

Of trees and tents



Press Photographs

by JIM STARKEY

In a story book it might be called the land of Oz. History books probably won't remember it at all. It's the kind of place you can stop to talk to a duck named Cecilia or become 11 feet tall on a wobbly pair of stilts. Long-haired kids with bare feet walk along with uniformed police. Tents of all descriptions are spread out along the walks, some the best store-bought kinds and some made of plastic and blankets tied together between trees.

It's the kind of place you won't find the

usual litter about. Supper is cooked on a makeshift grill made of bricks and steel rods. Dinner is free for anyone who seems a bit adventurous, and there is always plenty of free lemonade.

People talk quietly of politics, of Cambodia and Washington, of themselves and friends and sing of peace and love.

There isn't any violence here, but it isn't called the land of Oz. The kids on campus at Michigan State call it People's Park.



People's Park

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY East Lansing, Michigan 48823

May 4, 1970

Milton B. Dickerson, Vice President for Student Affairs, today issued the following statement on behalf of the MSU Administration:

The university administration has attempted in the extreme to take a tolerant and understanding attitude toward the "People's Park." The fact that camping and cook fires are in violation of at least two university ordinances was overlooked temporarily in the hope that those involved would themselves disband after a few days. This indulgent view was aided by the deportment of the park's inhabitants who generally conducted themselves with decency and friendliness. For example, there was no known involvement by the park people in Friday night's serious disturbances.

We respect these individuals for such conduct. We respect, and indeed many of us may envy, the desire for physical freedom, the urge to be closer to nature and the feeling of companionship exhibited by the park inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the continuation of the park in its present form poses serious problems for the university which it cannot ignore.

1. Brief toleration of violation of university ordinances, no matter how benign the infractions, cannot be extended to permanent abdication of responsibility. The university is legally accountable for enforcement of its ordinances.
2. There are indications that the camp may be becoming a temporary haven for non-students -- juveniles and others who may be attracted to it. The ebb and flow of the camp population as is dictated by weather and whim makes it impossible to provide proper security for individuals by the university or the student campers themselves. The university cannot tacitly or otherwise ignore the responsibility for this very real danger.
3. While the general neatness of the inhabitants in terms of litter and debris could well be a model for the student body as a whole, the physical situation of the park makes sanitation a definite and growing problem. The health of the campers and others is involved.
4. Continuing to countenance illegal existence of the park would make it difficult, if not impossible for the university to reasonably object to the erection of tents and camping equipment elsewhere on the campus.
5. The park is located in one of the busiest areas of the campus. Its boundaries continue to spread, with people and equipment threatening to inhibit access to the area. Additionally, damage to the grounds and trees cannot be avoided.

6. It is recognized that many students not directly involved with the park take a benevolent or disinterested attitude toward its existence. Others, however, have objected strenuously. Noise has become a factor. Complaints from parents and legislators also have been received. The park is on State property given over to the university to administer. The fact that it is public property does not mean that any member of the public can do with it as he wishes. Reasonable rules must be effected to provide the maximum use and enjoyment for all the public. The university believes that its rules are not unreasonable. It is willing to go as far as it can to accommodate the wishes and interests of the students.

For the above reasons, on Sunday representatives of the Dean of Students Office asked the inhabitants of the park to voluntarily end their camping. But the university, being sympathetic to the peaceful and humane spirit of the park, is prepared to discuss alternatives to preserve this spirit.

Among the alternatives for discussion are the following:

1. Continuation of the recreational activities on the present site, but without overnight camping or cooking.
2. Willingness to develop more permanent facilities for these recreational and "rap" activities either at the present site or one which is more acceptable or preferred by all MSU students.
3. Willingness to study jointly with students factors involved in developing a permanent site for student camping.

The university enters these discussions in good faith in the hope that positive results may emerge. It confidently expects that the park inhabitants and the rest of the student body will approach this issue in the same constructive spirit.

Campus Police Evict 'Free East' Campers

By PAT MURPHY
State Journal Staff Writer

Campus police put an end to tent city at Michigan State University early today. They evicted about 50 persons from a lot near the Veterinary Clinic at Bogue and Wilson.

Police closed in on "Free East"—as it was called by those who established it—about 4:30 a.m. today.

Richard O. Bernitt, director of public safety, said officers met with no resistance. One person was arrested, Bernitt said, after officers learned he was wanted by the State Police for a traffic violation.

Bernitt said there were about 30 tents in the area and occupants were simply instructed to pack up and leave. Any tents they left behind were confiscated temporarily.

Bernitt said closing the tent city today was connected with Sunday's commencement exercise.

"We wanted to clean up the area before graduation," Bernitt said. "If we would have

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waited, our maintenance people might not have had sufficient time."

Closing of the tent city was hardly a surprise move. Residents of the city reportedly held a farewell party last week in anticipation of their eviction.

Bernitt said police intelligence reports were that last week there were only 10 or 15 people living in Free East, all of whom he said were nonstudents.

Free East was one of two tent cities that sprang up after their residents—students and nonstudents of varying ages—decided the communes were the best way to lead a free, uninhibited life.

The first tent city, "Peoples Park," was established on April 25, in an area bounded roughly by Wells and Erickson residence halls and the International Center.

That park faded without fanfare as residents either moved away or shifted to Free East.

The existence of the parks prompted criticism from Michigan residents and legislators, who pointed out that camping violated a campus ordinance.

Both the campus and East Lansing police had reports of run-away youngsters living in the tent cities.

THE STATE JOURNAL
Metro
NEWS

Tues., June 9, 1970

Lansing—East Lansing, Michigan

A-3

U park formed during weekend

By LINDA KNIBBS
State News Staff Writer

Woodstock MSU, a people's park, was created over the weekend in the grassy area between Wells and Erickson halls.

"There is no place on campus for people to get together," a boy who preferred to be known as Ajax said. "This is it."

The philosophy of the park was recorded on a piece of paper posted to a tree:

"We, the people, having discovered this unused and open space, Do hereby and henceforth claim this area (land, Michael!) for our use and the use of our brothers and sisters by the power vested in us by virtue of our respective godhoods and/or gods, whatever that is. Love it; care for it; until the rivers run dry, the land blows away, the mountains fall into the sea, or the cobalt 60 gets us all (or we all get busted)."

The idea for the park originated during a meeting at Case Hall Friday night. The park began Saturday afternoon when people moved to the area after Case Hall's Festival of Life.

"About 4 p.m., we decided to come here to this liberated zone," Ajax said.

Saturday night more than

100 people gathered at the park, a girl called Miss Ralph estimated, and about 50 spent the night. Three tents were put up, but most people slept under the stars.

"Only a third of the people were from Case," Miss Ralph said. "The rest came from all over the campus."

Sunday afternoon the park attracted nearly 500 people, The Mad Dog and the Family Band played music while people sat on the grass, climbed trees, danced and enjoyed the sun. Others played volleyball, shot water pistols and flew kites.

Some people were handing out flyers saying, "Don't buy tickets, go free" to the ASMSU open air concert scheduled for May 24.

A girl announced over the band's loudspeaker that money would be collected from the crowd to buy food.

"If you donate some money we can all eat," she said.

Food has been cooked over small campfires near the tents. Campus police visited the park several times to check on the fires, Miss Ralph said.

The park will probably remain until the end of the term, Ajax said. A marshmallow roast is planned for Tuesday night.

Dickerson lets Free park stay

The residents of Free, a people's park between Wells and Erickson halls, were pressured Monday night — but not by University officials.

"As long as they are not damaging property they can stay," Milton Dickerson, vice president for student affairs, said Tuesday. "I understand they are happy, and we are not in the business of making people unhappy."

Pressure did come from the MSU Anarchists, sponsors of the Friday motorcycle ride for peace to the Capitol.

The MSU Anarchists were at Free Monday night trying to "work up" the people, but they didn't have any luck, Debbie Comstock, Norfolk, Mass., freshman said.

"The people here are not radicals," she said. "They just want to come here to have a good time."

Signs requesting participants for the 'cycle rally are hanging throughout the park.

"But people's park isn't for any political reasons," a student named David said.

Dickerson said his main concern is keeping the campus beautiful, and he is hoping the residents of Free will keep it that way.

A spokesman from the MSU Dept. of Public Safety said several men from that department have been to the park, but they have no plans of interfering.

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'FREE' CONTINUES

'People's Park' grows in size

By CHAS FLOWERS
State News Staff Writer

Dotted with tents and campfires at night, the space between Erickson and Wells halls remains what its name denotes, "Free." No word came Wednesday from the administration to contradict the Tuesday statement by Milton Dickerson, vice president for student affairs, that "they can stay."

Known also as Woodstock MSU and People's Park, the area has attracted an increasing number of campers and participants in the various activities there since its beginning Saturday.

An early morning rain Tuesday forced many campers with makeshift tents to leave the park. But they returned with plastic sheets and many slept through the Wednesday morning rain.

"It's generally agreed among the people here that this is the real living - learning complex," Nick Jackson explained. "You can learn a lot more out here than you can in the classroom."

Jackson said he and others decided that last week's sleep-in in Brody Hall was not reaching enough people, so they joined a group of Case Hall students who held a "Festival of Life" in a field near Case Saturday.

Another student who has helped organize the park, Beth Kutsche, Kalamazoo freshman, agreed that the park helped bring people together.

"Instead of being in their separate cells all the time, people can come here and have fun," Miss Kitsch said, adding that she lived in "liberated" Mason - Abbott.

People continue to come to the park. Some sing and play instruments. Others cook food on a brick camp stove. None mention leaving the park with its carnival atmosphere described by one student, Mike Burgoyne, as "functional anarchy."



Sitar man

Tony Karasek, Ferris State College sophomore, entertains the residents of People's Park with sitar music. Togetherness and the celebration of life is the order of the day as numbers grow at the park.

State News photo by Scott Friedl

ATH CONSULTANT

Mid-Campus Camp At MSU Gets Ouster

EAST LANSING (UPI) — Administrators say they have received letters from students complaining about the park and the noise coming from a rock concert held there over the weekend.

The living is great and no one has died from the food yet," said one coed while peeling a potato for the "great pot."

She lives in one of the 80 tents in "People's Park," described by residents as a place to meet people and communicate.

MSU officials asked students Monday to clear out the impromptu campground set up April 25.

Officials asked the students to leave voluntarily, citing campus ordinances against camping and open fires. They set no deadline for clearing the park, nor did they say what action might be taken if the students do not leave.

The tents come in all shapes, sizes, colors and materials, ranging from expensive store varieties to makeshift tepees and one parachute hanging from a tree. In between classes, students entertain themselves by reading, playing guitars and cards, talking or just sunning in the warm spring sunshine.

"You can go to MSU for four years and never meet anyone," said the girl. "It's really wonderful to get to know people again."

At the park's kitchen, consisting of an iron kettle over an open fire and a wooden table sheltered by a canvas cover on four poles, residents drift in and out to do their part in getting dinner under way. The job is not an easy one since no one ever knows how many people are coming to dinner.

"When we started out here last week, there were about four or five tents," said Dick Rosemont of Birmingham.

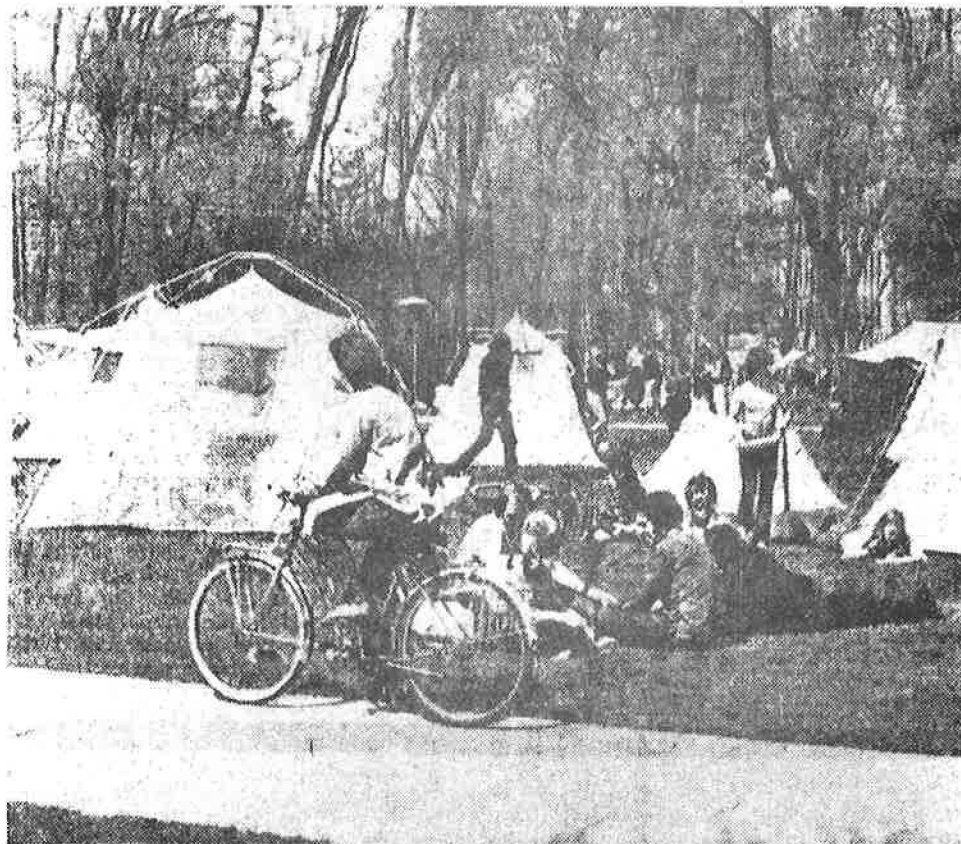
"There's nothing political here," said one student who only identified himself as Terry. "We just want to get together."

But no one seems to worry much. Tin cans are placed around the litter-free acre where kids drop in money to pay for the food. Other persons bring food to share, like the bear meat.

A giant-sized bottle of red-colored vitamins rests on the kitchen table for "those concerned with their nutrition."

The park began when a group of students decided to do something about the alienation they felt in the 40,000 - student university. The camp - out was their answer.

"This is the place to find yourself and the place to find someone else," reads a poem tacked on a bulletin board.



"People's Park" on Michigan State University Campus

—UPI Telephoto

"People's Park" - history

LET A THOUSAND PARKS BLOOM?

To SJS

In educational fads it is said "Things always happen first at Berkley." On a 270' X 450' lot owned by the Berkley regents the first "people's park" appeared in May of 1969. The unimproved vacant lot, neither on the campus nor being put to any use by the university, was appropriated by non-bureaucrats, self-styled "the people." "The occupants of the Park," according to Wolin and Schaar, "wanted to use the land for a variety of projects, strange but deeply natural, which defied customary forms and expectations, whereas, at worst, the University saw the land as something to be fenced, soil-tested, processed through a maze of committees and finally encased in the tight and tidy form of rational design." 1

Inflexible rules and ordinances were found and repeated to the scores of squatters from the university and the community. When the bureaucracy noticed that there was no respect for their authority, i.e., when the repetition of the rules had no effect, power was used, and the police were called. The battlelines were drawn: the "free people" -- liberated from the obedience of habit, and with convictions toward humanizing rather than ordering their world -- on one side; and, on the other, the inflexible university bureaucracy -- unequipped to understand the life style on their land, and with Reagan's well-equipped storm troopers ready to aid in keeping order and smashing anarchy.

Against assault by air and land, the defenders of people's park were like the Ethiopians fighting Mussolini's air force with rocks. Citing problems of sanitation, safety, legal liability, outside elements, and "the refusal to organize a responsible committee," the university unleashed the police. Heads were smashed and the area was sprayed with pepper gas (banned by the Geneva Convention in war). Fences were erected and guarded. The land today remains barren, but the spirit of people's park lives on.

A year later Michigan State University had its very own People's Park. If I remember it with something other than the usual warm glow, at least I am not beating a dead whore. Prostitution of spontaneous humanity into the ritualized forms of collective living is alive, flourishing, and undermining efforts to create a liveable society. The whole problem is summed up in a State News description: "the park did give the 'straight' middle-class students a chance to temporarily enjoy a 'free life' without social repercussions." 2 The inauthenticity of MSU's people's park is evident in the temporary escape and in the avoidance of "social repercussions." At the time of Cambodia and Kent State, many

1. Wolin, Sheldon and Schaar John. "Berkley: The Battle of People's Park," The New York Review of Books June 19, 1969, p. 29
2. State News, Welcome Week issue, p. A2

students across the country demonstrated their horror. And perhaps wallowing in the sunny haze of People's Park was no more futile than writing to Congressmen and participating in peace marches to effect needed changes, but the passive, cynical resignation from assorted communes of drop-outs only fanned the resentments of the unliberated while still allowing the government to perpetrate its Kents and Cambodias.

The administration's handling of the park matched the indulgence of the residents. Even though "Free," as the park was called, lacked the legitimacy of its Berkley predecessor, no attack like Berkley's occurred. Rather than in an unused lot off-campus, the celebrators of the April 25 Case Hall Festival of Life camped in the very center of the campus between Wells Hall and Erickson Hall, just across the river from the Administration Building. And rather than planting flowers and grass, and building swings for neighborhood children as at Berkley, the residents killed the grass with some 100 tents that did not improve the area (other than painting the sidewalks) or benefit anyone. Proper revolutionaries said the park was a haven for middle-class children supported in the university elite by the sufferings of the poor and black. The fact that the youth of people's park-MSU could choose and later escape from their slums marks a great difference from a youth who is permanently and involuntarily trapped in a real slum. A girl passing through the park was told to "smile, it's free." She corrected the park philosophy by responding, "no, it's taxable."³

Meanwhile, the taxpayers, a statistical majority of "the people," were not amused at the blight they perceived in the middle of MSU, and were further alienated by a photograph of a circle of undressed residents. "It's a problem of an obvious violation of University ordinances," Vice-President Perrins said. "When you allow it, then you are subject to legitimate questions from the legislature and the public as to why."⁴

As had Berkley's People's Park, MSU's "Free" raised questions of administrative flexibility and the erosion of authority. On May 2, 1970 The University requested that the inhabitants of the park voluntarily end their camping, noting ordinances on building fires, camping, the menace of a non-student haven, and the administration's concern for the sanitation and safety of the residents. Vice-President for Student Affairs Milton Dickerson echoed Berkley in his statement with the added advantage of being able to note, "The park is located in one of the busiest areas of the campus. Its boundaries continue to spread, with people and equipment threatening to inhibit access to the area. Additionally, damage to the grounds and trees cannot be avoided."⁵

3. Ibid., p. 2A

4. State News, May 4, 1970, p. 3

5. Ibid., p. 4

Within hours the Kent State murders occurred and the university had to delay shutting down the park to combat the student strike that followed. By May 19 the administration had moved the park (actually there were then two parks, one more or less sanctioned, until the end of the term). Summer came and with the student exodus the park and strike died.

Timing?

So, now that it's gone and should be a pleasant memory, don't knock it, right? But though the bureaucratic problem of the tents is gone, there is for the student committed to social change a continuing struggle to avoid being silenced by a benign neglect of his eccentricities. (American society while allowing his long hair and pot-smoking (so long as he is an accredited member of the elite) lums peasants in Viet-Nam and starves blacks in the ghettos.) There is a strong lure to the romance of growing your food in some far-off commune and "getting yourself together." But there are social repercussions to withdrawing from the sordid world into the splendid, pure self. First, it appears to adults that the political involvement of the peace movement, the strike, and the McCarthy campaign was merely a fad, that Youth has no real commitment to obtaining peace and equality. Second and also unintentionally, it gives tacit approval to the status quo to groove on the state's land, or even to return to the pastoral idyll on private property. Certainly one does not withdraw to the happy, simple life to support the society from which he withdraws. But without trying to be "alienateder than thou," I still assert that this latest form of slumming is an individual luxury we can ill afford. [?] Indeed, it is symptomatic of the same selfish sloth that has allowed the erosion of the American dream into its current nightmare.

Abandoning the technological world for a simpler life is not a viable alternative for most people. Lack of sanitation is not a particularly admirable goal. But new life-styles that overcome the dehumanization of the computerized bureaucratic world are necessary. And experiments in free living cannot instantly produce the answers, but any life style that abandon's most of one's fellows cannot save us. Society must be humanized, not abolished. As yet, a concentrated effort has not been made to end the war. Before retreating either into revolution or into apathy, we must make that effort, abandoning illusions about the ease of our task and about the validity of the tactics we have thusfar been using.

It will require more than a few hours a week, and certainly will not meet with instant success. At every turn attempts to placate us without our goals will be made (e.g. the one day cooling-off period used by the administration during the first week of the strike, the draft lottery, and the "phasing down" of the war), but by hard work, these goals may be reached. Occasional demonstrations and parks may be necessary for relaxation, but they must not be allowed to become ends in themselves--travesties of freedom. Let us return to the work of subverting this country back towards its ideals.

TERRY TERRY RETURNING!

"REFORM is always the creation of new usages. ... Any reform movement which is limited to correcting slovenly or slipshod abuses in our university will lead inevitably to a reform which is equally slovenly."

-Jose Ortega y Gasset,
Mission of the University

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Since the draft still remains a major problem for most students, I have decided to once again begin submitting helpful hints for those who have still not decided to have nothing to do with the draft system at all (which is probably the best suggestion) and those whose number will be coming up for the first time in '71.

I would first recommend the obtaining of the Handbook for Conscientious Objectors, printed by the CCC. It's very informative -- not just for CO's. \$1.00.

Also, if anyone has any good suggestions or knows of good draft counselors, please submit them to me or the phalanstery office.

(The following is from 1001 Ways to Beat the Draft)

11. Start to menstruate. (better red than dead.)
 67. Get your friends to crucify you.
 125. Become chairman of the Committee to Legalize Marijuana.
 252. Tear up your contrat social.
 271. Send a German shepherd instead because you heard that a German shepherd is worth ten soldiers (especially against women).--
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"THEREFORE you must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if you feel you should not follow it, you must not stay with it under any conditions. To have such clarity you must lead a disciplined life. Only then will you know that any path is only a path, and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question. This question is one that only a very old man asks. My benefactor told me about it once when I was young; and my blood was too vigorous for me to understand it. Now I do understand it. I will tell you what it is: Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life I could say I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere. My benefactor's question has meaning now. Does this path have a