

### Mystery of Early Michigan Gardens Still Is Unsolved

ANN ARBOR — Michigan had gardens before Columbus discovered America, according to Harold O. Whittemore, professor of landscape architecture in the University of Michigan College of Architecture and Design.

Of prehistoric age and origin and known as "garden beds," patterns of these long-vanished plots are found in the Kalamazoo and St. Joseph river valleys and the prairie openings in Southwestern Michigan, the landscape expert says.

They were located in nine Michigan counties.

KALAMAZOO county, with 17, had more of the garden beds than any other county. St. Joseph county enjoys the distinction of having contained the largest—a bed of 120 acres located near Three Rivers. Branch county had two, Van Buren, three; Cass one; Berrien one; Shawansee three; Sanilac one; and Saginaw one.

In 1748, Whittemore states, the explorer La Varenne reported their existence to the French government. In 1827 Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Indian agent at Sault Ste. Marie, gave their plans and accurate measurements.

WHITTEMORE explains that the raised patches of ground were about 17 inches in height and were arranged in plats or blocks of parallel beds separated by sunken paths and scalloped work with ample walks between.

"Some, like the one which was situated in the city of Kalamazoo where the park club house now stands, were in the form of a cart-wheel with radiating paths and rims. Others were shaped like a gridiron in regular straight-line designs with parallel ridges at a distance of about three feet," he states.

"The garden beds, which received their distinctive name because they resembled beds in a formal garden, have all been destroyed. What knowledge we have of them has been gathered from the writings of Schoolcraft, surveyor Beia Hubbard, and a few

others who saw them in their original form." Whittemore says. "In extent," he continues, "they covered from 20 to 120 acres. The plots into which they were divided were laid out with an order, skill and symmetry which sets them apart from any known operations of agriculture north of Mexico."

WHO MADE the mysterious gardens? Whittemore says Michigan's aboriginal period shows the southern part of the state and the nearby Ohio and Mississippi valleys inhabited from very ancient times by mound building, village building, and garden-planting Indians who had since been driven southward by the more warlike hunting-fishing tribes like the Shawnees, Pottawattomies, Chippewas, Fox and Sauks.

"No doubt, these ancient, peace-loving tribes planted the garden beds with the medicinal herbs they found most useful," the landscape expert concludes.

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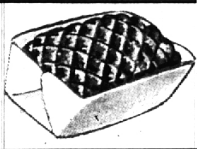
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