

NICHOLS ARBORETUM:

Landscape change from 1940 to 2008



1940



1960



1979



1990



2002



2008

Now affectionately known by locals as "the Arb", the land that became the Nichols Arboretum has long been considered one of Ann Arbor's most scenic places. The Arb was designated in 1907, combining several smaller tracts of land, some purchased by the City of Ann Arbor in 1906 and others donated in 1907 by the Nichols, Burns and Newcombe families. The easternmost section of the property, including what is now the Alex Dow Field prairie restoration project, was donated by Mr. Dow, Trustee of Detroit Edison (now DTE Energy), in 1943.

In the late 19th century, timber was harvested from the Arb's Oak-Hickory woodlands, but because the terrain is too steep for farming they were allowed to regenerate. In his 1906 design for the Arboretum, landscape architect O. C. Simonds emphasized native scenery, leaving much of the property relatively wild and using carefully placed plantings to provide a graceful transition from the more formal gardens located near the main entrances.

The landscape within the Arb has changed only subtly over time, but the surrounding land has seen much residential development, as well as the expansion of the University Hospital complex bordering the northwest corner.